

One Tin Soldier – Chapter 13

“It’s a shame you didn’t go all the way and get rockets and hand grenades.”

“But! I have a copy of FM 3.23.30 and it shows most of the foreign hand grenades. Don’t know what they have these days to replace their copy of the RPG-7 but they won’t be too hard to figure out. I don’t plan to get close enough to the Chinese troops to have to worry about most of their weapons. I done some reading and I know they have some anti-tank stuff filled with ball bearings or some such, PF-98 and so forth. They have to be able to see you to shoot at you and you can just call me the grey ghost.”

“Not particularly overconfident are you Jason?”

“Not really, no. You and I both pretty much know the area. We have weapons than can reach out and touch someone. After we touch a bit, we’ll sneak in and recover what we don’t have, be it hand grenades or rockets. Just don’t go dragging back any of those crappy AK-47s or whatever the Chinese call them.”

“So, we’re not going to just sit down here and wait out the war?”

“You can if you want to David, but I’m going out making a statement.”

“What kind of statement?”

“Kiss my butt? I don’t know, but first things first. We need to get those two sheets of plywood and cover the stair down to the shelter. Throw some of that sand and gravel I have piled there for that very purpose. Then, we put the cross bolts in place on the storage building doors. They can get in but it would take a detonation charge. Finally, we’ll put the hay and straw in front of the front barn door but not the back. Did I tell you about the roof access from the second floor of the storage building? No matter, it’s there in case we had a problem with a panel or something. It does give us a second story to look at the surrounding country. Had to raise the panels because we decided at the last minute to put in a parapet with merlons and crenels. That’s why it sort of looks like a castle.”

“Whoa, you slow down; you’re losing me here.”

“Get your rifle, pistol, load bearing equipment and a pair of leather gloves. I’ll explain as we do it.”

“Ok if I finish my Coke first?”

“Chug-a-lug, chug-a-lug, Make you want to holler hi-de-ho, Burns your tummy, don’tcha know Chug-a-lug, chug-a-lug.”

“Don’t remember his name, but he’s dead.”

“Roger Miller.”

“Ah, right.”

“Grab a sheet and put it up near the door. I’ll use the second to fill the gap. Ok, now, shovel maybe 2” on top; just enough to hide the plywood well.”

“What’s next? Oh, bar the doors.”

“Changed my mind. Hay and straw first, it will be easier.”

“We gonna put the tarps back in place?”

“Might just as well. Next the storage building. You notice how I made provision for the cross bars for the door? Used 3 laminated 2x12s for each cross bar. Now we do the same to the back and we can check out the roof.”

“There’s no windows in this building. I guess I just never noticed.”

“This way was a whole lot cheaper and safer. Twelve inch reinforced walls with fine mesh tied to the rebar.”

“What for?”

”Because it cost more? Well it did but that wasn’t the reason. The reason was EMP. I had thought of acquiring spares of most things and storing them in here. Never got around to it. But, all of our radios work just fine so it doesn’t much matter.”

“What do you have?”

“Four Yaesu all band ham radios and two Galaxy a DX2547 AM/SSB CB Base Radios and two Cobra 148GTL SSB radios plus six Cobra HH Roadtrip 40 channel portables with the Cobra Microtalk MA-EBM Earbud Microphones. Should have gotten some of those Motorola VHF business band radios. Got side tracked, I suppose.”

“How many do you want?”

“I would have bought one CM 300 32 channel radio for each vehicle plus one or two with power supplies as base stations. I’d have gone with the CP 200 16 channel portables.”

“Do you have another antenna standoff?”

“I have a spare in case one of the three got damaged. Do you know something I don’t?”

“How much coax?”

“About 80 feet.”

“Would a 100’ prewired coil of RG-8 work?”

“I’m pretty sure it would.”

“And you’ll need an antenna.”

“Yes antennas for each of the CM300s. A coil of RG-8 plus three vehicle antennas. The portables have antennas with them.”

“No, base station antennas? Are we done here?”

“Let me show you the roof first.”

“The overall wall that you see is a parapet. The uprights are called merlons and the firing slots crenels. The parapet is 6’ tall and the crenels are 4’ tall. Won’t protect against RPGs but it provides good small arms protection.”

“I like the idea that it has access from inside the building. A person wouldn’t have to expose himself to fire getting up here.”

“You’re right, but that’s not why I put in the access that I did. It was simply cheaper.”

“You watch the small change and the rest takes care of itself?”

“Exactly. Remember I said that I wouldn’t be surprised if Kristin’s broker moved her investment to gold and silver.”

“Did he?”

“Told her he got a wild hair and cashed her out and put everything in gold and silver Eagles. The safe was nearly full and she had to find a place to store the excess. We compromised. I took out my gold and silver and that gave her plenty of room. Ended up back in the steamer truck I originally used to store it. It’s well secured in an out of the way place.”

“I was able to get 13 20-round magazines for my rifle.”

“We can give you a few more. The guy who bought those 6 cases of Radway was probably me. It ran \$450 a case plus tax. A little higher than Aim Surplus but no waiting for UPS to deliver it.”

“You a church going man?”

“As a kid. Only went one time while I was in the Air Force. Went on 9/11 for the last time. One other thing, Kristin has taken a shine to your children. Don’t worry about clothing for the moment. I suspect that Melody wouldn’t understand so just let her find out if and when we have to dig out the clothing. Melody and you are on your own.”

“The two of us are well supplied with clothing but the kids grow so fast.”

“Do you think you can get her to try a Browning Hi-Power?”

“Maybe. Those oversized Python grips were too big for her and the .40 S&W a little too powerful. If not that, maybe your Mark II.”

“That’s what we figured. That Mark II is only a .22. It’s a little light for a proper defensive handgun.”

“Maybe start her on the .22 and move her to the 9mm?”

“That would be my choice. We going to have to maintain a 24/7 watch on the roof of the storage building. Should we go with 4 6 hour shifts or 8 3 hour shifts?”

“We could start with the 3 hour shifts and move to 6 after everyone is accustomed the shorter shifts.”

“Do you know anywhere in Story County that sells explosives?”

“I don’t think so. We could probably get them in Des Moines. Alternately we could mix up some ANFO.”

“Who in Des Moines?”

“Binns & Stevens Explosives, but they’re actually in Oskaloosa and have a listing in the Des Moines Yellow Pages. Where are you going with this?”

“It’s pretty hard to move on roads with blown bridges and overpasses.”

“There are maybe a dozen bridges/overpasses between Ames and Des Moines.”

“Exactly.”

“If that’s plan, the sooner we go the better.”

“Side roads or main highway?”

“Side roads. It will take longer but should be safer. One condition, Jason. At the first sign of trouble, we turn around and come back.”

“Agreed.”

“How much do you know about explosives?”

“I saw Force 10 from Navarone.”

“Ha-ha, funny. You’re joking, right?”

“Well, I saw The Dirty Dozen, but they used gasoline and hand grenades. I also saw Where Eagles Dare.”

“Yeah and only Lee Marvin and Charles Bronson survived in the first and only Eastwood and Burton in the second.”

“We’ve got some with the caps and lots of det cord. We’ll use what looks like enough and adjust from there. Since dynamite is being replaced by other explosives, we’ll just have to experiment.”

“Right, you have no experience.”

“There’s a first time for everything. I ran across something on Wiki and followed the link. I downloaded a pdf file and I think I saved it under the title explosives. It was some guide for law enforcement concerning explosives. Let’s bring up that file and see what it shows. If I remember correctly, there was an appendix discussing specific explosives and various uses, like shaped charges. We can’t check if there’s an update with the net down.”

“You were right. At least we know what to look for. It sounds like PETN in its various forms is what we need. We can get the number 8 caps to set it off, either electrical or fuse type. Are you sure we want to do this Jason?”

“I’m not 100% positive David. If we can help contain them, even briefly, it gives our troops time to get in place. There’s a downside, of course. When our forces do arrive, they’ll be up against the same barriers we created to contain the Chinese. What we could do is acquire the materials from Oskaloosa and decide what to do later. It’s like you said, if we’re going to do it, it had better be now.”

Surprisingly, there was someone at the business in Oskaloosa. The first thing he wanted to see was our ‘explosives card’. Said he couldn’t sell any to people without ‘the card’. We explained why we wanted the materials and went on to explain that we didn’t really know what we were doing. He paused in thought for some time. Apparently, he had an epiphany and started to lay out things on the counter. When he finished making his selections, we got a very quick lesson on what we had and how to use it. He even suggested quantities for various tasks.

“Any questions?”

“About a million give or take. I don’t want you hurt by this so how about I pay for it in gold?”

“You can pay? I thought you wanted a donation to use against those Chicom SOBs. Hold on and I’ll get you some more. You say you’re going to try and drop bridges and overpasses? Let me get you some of the shaped charges we carry and explain their use. Best if I give you electrical caps and a blasting machine while I’m at it. Don’t really have time to conduct a training class on explosives so you’re going to have to go down and dirty. I’ll give you plenty of blasting wire but try to recover as much as you can and reuse it.”

“That was easier than I thought.”

“Desperate times call for desperate measures David.”

“Where are you going to store the stuff?”

“Haven’t figured that out yet. The most sensitive things we have are the blasting caps, he said. Have to think about that on the way home. Call home on the Yaesu and tell Kristin we’re on our way home.”

“Kristin, this is David. We’re on our way home.”

“Ten four.”

“At least you didn’t give anyone time to get a fix on us or her.”

“You didn’t say to keep communications tight, but it seemed like it was the thing to do. I really had an urge to ask how things were going at home but that would only expose their location.”

“I didn’t see a scope on your rifle.”

“Didn’t have the time or money to get that done.”

“I have my Schmidt and Bender you can use for now. If we don’t have to borrow one from a gun store, I won’t have to debate the differences between salvage, scavenge, scrounging and looting with you. It’s a pretty fine line anyway, but salvage and scavenge generally refers to abandoned property, scrounging is begging and looting refers to possessed property. Picking up something at the dump is scavenging, recovering cargo from a ship or trailer involved in an accident is salvaging and looting is taking something from someone when the opportunity arises.”

“I wouldn’t consider taking things from a wrecked trailer to be taking abandoned property.”

“Not under normal circumstances. But after they’ve cleaned up the accident site and recovered all they’re going to recover, what about something in the ditch they might have missed? If they’re not going to spend more time looking, it’s abandoned. Mostly the discussion pertains to recovery of hard goods in a PAW.”

“That raises a question. Assuming, for sake of discussion, we defeat the invaders. What then?”

“It has been suggested that in that case they’ll have nothing to lose and we’ll need to duck and cover.”

“Huh?”

“What TOM calls Global Thermonuclear War or GTW. The parties, having failed to achieve their aims, have nothing to lose. There are five primary nuclear powers and several minor nuclear powers. The US, Russia, UK, France and China are the five major powers. Israel, India, Pakistan, North Korea and possibly Iran are the minor powers. There could be more like Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, Germany, Japan and so forth. Nobody knows until they test a weapon. Israel maintains a policy of refusing to officially confirm or deny having a nuclear arsenal, or having developed nuclear weapons, or even having a nuclear weapons program. It’s called nuclear ambiguity.”

“Don’t we have weapons sharing through NATO?”

“We do. Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey have been provided nuclear weapons to deploy and store. This involves pilots and other staff of the ‘non-nuclear’ NATO states practicing, handling, and delivering the US nuclear bombs, and adapting non-US warplanes to deliver US nuclear bombs. Canada and Greece have opted out of the weapons sharing. Apparently the US nuclear weapons based in Europe are in the sole possession and under constant and complete custody and control of the United States.”

“How can that be if a nuclear bomb is placed aboard a German fighter?”

“It is ambiguous, isn’t it? Supposedly that would only happen in the case of a war and the bombs would be classified as tactical nukes.”

“So even if we win, we lose?”

“So it would seem.”

“But what about the other major power, Russia?”

“Who knows?”

“We have to stop on the way back to get those Motorola radios. Bet you thought I forgot. They’re used but are all functional. There are more than you want, so we can take as many as we need.”

“If we can find an antenna switch, we can hook up the base radios to a single antenna. It would probably be a good idea to put the switch in the shelter and set it to either the house or shelter as appropriate.”

“What do you use for a ground?”

“An eight foot copper coated $\frac{5}{8}$ ” steel rod with four inches exposed. There’s one for the bungalow and one for the shelter.”

“Where did you get those?”

“Radio Shack before it became whatever it is now. Most of their radios are CBs or those FRS/GMRS radios. They’re a lot different than they were in the earlier years. Where are we getting the radios?”

“A company I know of that replaced their radios with newer digital radios. It’s a plumbing company with two locations, hence two base stations and two base antennas. Every truck had a 32 channel mobile and every employee, excluding office personnel, a portable. They had the software to reprogram the radios as they licensed additional channels. The equipment is stored in a warehouse in Nevada. It’s not abandoned but it isn’t being used.”

“Can we get into Nevada without being spotted?”

“Yes, there are several ways. I brought my universal key with me.”

“What’s that?”

“A 30” Stanley Fubar.”

“Use that much?”

“Several times, it does at least eight different things. Had to use it in an accident more than once.”

“Accident?”

“Car wreck. Take that road coming up on your right. That will take us right where we need to go.”

I slowed and made the turn. David said we weren't that far out and I kept my speed down. We'd been on the road for some time and we had no idea how far the soldiers had spread out from the Ames Municipal Airport. Or, for that matter, if they we somehow bottled up at the airport by a bunch of flag loving patriots.

"Pull up to that door."

"Shut it down or keep it running?"

"We'll be gone in three minutes or less."

That door popped open like he had a key and he was inside in a flash. He was back in 30 seconds with a large box, which he put in the back of the pickup and turned to get more. It took three trips to get the radios and power supplies plus rolls of RG-8. On his fourth trip, he brought out the antennas, placing them in the back of the pickup. He went back, pulled the door shut and climbed in the pickup.

"Go."

"Three minutes and twenty seconds. No bad. Knew where the stuff was, huh?"

"I made an inquiry concerning how much they wanted for it. Low key, kind of a just curious kind of question. They went through the boxes for me showing what they had available. Sometimes people are a little more cooperative with an officer."

"And sometimes you run into someone like me."

"That too. You weren't that bad. I was impressed with the fact that the first round in your shotgun was a beanbag. A non-lethal shot should get the message across. If it doesn't, the buckshot may be called for. The three shells each represented an escalation in force. That's in the spirit of the law. I'm well aware of Iowa Code section 704; we all are. They're changing the terminology too. They really should be called less lethal rather than non-lethal. Non-lethal is the military term while less lethal or less than lethal is commonly used by law enforcement. I also took note of your approach to people picking the blackberries. Jacking the slide on a pump shotgun is a real attention getter."

"But it's all the same stuff isn't it?"

"Pretty much. I'm not familiar with the military non-lethal, only the stuff we use."

"What do you use?"

"Bean bag, rubber baton, OC."

"You have some with you?"

“A little. I didn’t assume much of our activity would involve less lethal.”

“I’m not certain at this point exactly what we’re going to do. You and I know our capabilities and the tools we have to work with. As you pointed out, I’m no explosives expert. Getting set up by a professional in the business makes it easier with the most dangerous part, the caps.”

“Timothy McVeigh used ammonium nitrate and Nitromethane (ANNM). It’s available as fuel for drag racing. If push comes to shove, we can go that way.”

“Court of last resort?”

“To respond to your assertion about not knowing what to do, I saw a movie once with Clint Eastwood playing a Marine Gunnery Sergeant.”

“*Heartbreak Ridge*. TOM brings it up often. *Improvise. Adapt. Overcome.*”

If you know this guy, why don’t you use his name?”

“I’m not sure; it wouldn’t seem right. I’d think of the drunk I knew during the early sixties instead of what he’s made of himself. Somewhat knowledgeable on preparedness.”

“Kristin called him a guru.”

“That’s not for me to say. He does like the right firearms, I’ll give him that.”

“What’s he have?”

“An M1A Loaded, Mossberg 590A1 and a Taurus PT1911B. He apparently has a .32 auto taken off a dead Nazi during WW II. His dad bought it from the guy who captured it and gave it to him when they pulled stakes in Phoenix.”

“Where’s he from?”

“Charles City, but he wasn’t a native. He was born in 43, same as me, on an island in San Francisco Bay, Alameda. We also had a guy in the unit from Sumner, I think; missile engine mechanic.”

“What was he doing on an Island?”

“That’s where the Naval Air Station, Alameda, is. He said his father was a metal smith.”

“Civilian or military?”

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“Civilian. He was 4F. You learn a lot about a person when they’re in their cups.”

“Did he know he was a drunk?”

“As a matter of fact, I think he did. He said he was carrying on a ‘family tradition’.”

“Didn’t think much of his father, huh?”

“About the same as me. I couldn’t tell you if any of my relatives are living or dead. That much we had in common. I could have gotten into the booze, but at Lowry, I got drunk and decided that alcohol was my enemy. He was there at the same time in a different class and made a different decision. We’re here. See anything out of the ordinary?”

“Not really.”

“Call Kristin on the CB and say, ‘Situation’. If we’re in the clear, she’ll say ‘Copasetic’. Borrowed that out of Jerry’s story, ‘What If?’.”

“You do everything TOM and Jerry suggest?”

“A fella could do worse.”

“Situation.”

“Copasetic.”

“What would she have said if things weren’t copasetic?”

“Hunky-dory. Same source. We’ve read the stories several times because they educate and entertain. For example, if you ask me the hermit’s name I’d say Neal Grant. Or if you wanted to know the cowboy’s name it is Craig Davenport but you can just call him cowboy. Leonard Dobbs got rich off of peak oil and Louie Vargos, despite being laid back, got the girl. TOM had a series revolving around himself and two friends who Fleataxi dubbed *The Three Amigos* probably based on the movie of the same name.”

“What goes where?”

“Access the storage building from the barn or greenhouse and open the front door. The explosives will go in there. Same with the radio equipment for the moment. I’ll go find someplace to store the electrical blasting caps. You keeping track of all the laws we’ve broken so far?”

“Nope, I lost count.”

“That’s got it. I fed the livestock while I was at it and gathered the eggs. The box of caps is to your right at the top of the ladder to the barn loft under about 6” of grain. I’m going to check in with Kristin and see if I have time before supper to muck the barn out.”

“How do you handle the smell?”

“If it really gets ripe, I dab a little Vicks under my nose.”

“Any trouble?”

“Quite the contrary. There was a guy at the explosives place and he selected the explosives we needed and even gave us brief lesson. I went ahead and paid for what we got. On the way back, we detoured to Nevada and got a slew of business band radios and equipment. The barn needs cleaned out; how long before supper?”

“One hour.”

“David, would you give me a hand? Vicks is in the bathroom medicine cabinet.”

“You have some rubber boots?”

“Being the good Boy Scout that I am, several pairs.”

“Let me hit the head and get the Vick’s. Five minutes.”

“Know anything about what’s going on in Ames?”

“They brought in six cargo planes of troops and two planes of equipment and stores. So far the hunters have managed to keep them bottled up at the airport. That can’t last, that’s two companies of troops with modern weapons against less than 100 on our side equipped with hunting rifles and an occasional military style firearm.”

“It looks like our work is cut out for us.”

“I established contact with a few on our side. One of them is a demolition expert. He said to call him on channel 31 on the lower side band if you were successful. I’m speculating here, but he probably has the same idea you have, cutting off their routes of egress.”

“Only the major routes. There are too many farm to market roads to completely cut them off. Do you have a name or call sign?”

“Demolition Man. I used our last names, Jones and Lawson. Since I switched back to Wells, it would be hard to pin us down. Unless you want some nom de guerre.”

“I may just do that. How does Single Barrel sound?”

“Like a made up name.”

“How about Jack Black or Jose Cuervo?”

“Jack Black.”

“I try to reach him.”

“Demolition Man this is Jones.”

“Gotcha 5 by 5. Successful?”

“Affirm.”

“What did you get?”

“Mostly PETN, det cord, electric caps and a blasting machine. Some shaped charges.”

“Ten Four. Want a face to face?”

“Affirm.”

“Where?”

“East side of Skunk River bridge on 595th.”

“Wait one. Ok got it, when?”

“Tomorrow eight am.”

“Affirm.”

“Will now use Jack Black.”

“Rog, Jack Black.”

“Jack Black clear.”

“Are you going to just show up? What if it's a trap?”

“We're leaving at 6am on horseback. We'll stash the horses in that timber over there and wait for them to show up. If they're on time we'll have to wait about 90 minutes. That's ample time to check out the location. When they show up, if it looks clear, we'll approach on foot, armed to the teeth. Rifle, shotgun and pistol. I'll give you two white smoke grenades, just in case.”

“You don’t think we should just go home?”

“Are you nuts? We’re secure here in the shelter and can keep an eye on the outside. Assuming Demolition Man is on the up and up, maybe we can stop this before it gets out of hand. At least here in central Iowa. I know for a fact that you can get from Mason City to Edwards AFB in 42 hours if you can travel non-stop. My average speed was 55mph.”

“I thought you left home and never looked back.”

“Went back for my pickup. Flew in, took a cab home, got into the truck and left. Waved goodbye to my mom and never looked back.”

“Have you ever stopped and thought how much that grudge you have against your old man cost you?”

“No, it’s water under the bridge. Let’s get some sleep, tomorrow comes early. We have to tend to the livestock before we leave.”

“Oh, yuck.”

“We’d be leaving through the barn anyway.”

“Did you talk to Demolition Man?”

“Yes. We’re meeting at 8 am over by the bridge.”

“Good. I don’t like the idea of you messing around with explosives since you clearly don’t know much about them.”

“Maybe one good turn will lead to another.”

“What do you mean?”

“Maybe I can trade him the explosives for some hand grenades or LAW rockets.”

“You sound just like TOM. He’s not satisfied until he has his cowboy guns, a .50 caliber rifle, hand grenades and LAW rockets. Did you ever notice that he accumulates the stuff but never seems to use it?”

“Would you rather have...”

“Yes, I know. The grenades and LAW rockets are about the only thing we don’t have.”

“We don’t have any M1022.”

“If there’s a way to get some, I’m sure you’ll find it.”

“I wonder whatever happened to Charlie.”

“I hear he retired.”

“He’s still around?”

“Haven’t seen him in a while but I assume so.”

“Do you know his last name?”

“Uh-un.”

“How about where he lives?”

“Ankeny.”

“Oh great, one in fifty thousand people. I’ve got a little extra energy to burn off. Any ideas?”

“One.”

I was out of bed at four-thirty and had the coffee brewing while I showered. I dressed in jeans with a western shirt and my riding boots. I slipped the PT1911 in its paddle holster above my right rear pocket and strapped on the Laredoan. I then laid out my Super Match, 870, the two Marlin rifles and my coach gun. The saddle bags held extra ammunition already and the Rugers were in the pommel bag holsters. I poured a cup of coffee and hauled the guns through the tunnel to the barn, taking two trips to complete the task.

David came out of their door at five ten.

“Coffee is ready, but we have to shake a leg. Put out the guns you want and I’ll take them to the barn.”

“I didn’t get those M14 magazines from you.”

“I loaded them for you. Grab a shower, get a cup of coffee and let’s get gone. I’ll be waiting in the barn.”

He poured the coffee and took it with him into the bathroom. I gathered up his duty shotgun, M1A and the magazines and headed for the barn. He showed up around ten to six by which time I’d fed the livestock and gathered the eggs. I’d even had time to take the eggs back to the shelter and put them in the fridge. I’d had a couple of those vile

toaster pastries for breakfast and left the package out for him to find. Being almost pure sugar, they're a quick source of energy.

"I saddled your horse."

"Which one is mine?"

"The one with empty scabbards."

"How many guns did you bring?"

"Six handguns, my 870, my coach gun, both Marlins and my Super Match. What, not enough?"

"By the time you figure out which one you want to shoot, you'll be dead,"

"Don't you worry about that; just so you know, your nom de guerre will be Jose Cuervo."

"Why that one?"

"Because I took Jack Black."

"Oh, names of different kinds of booze, huh?"

"The light came on? I think maybe Kristin will go by Sapphire rather than Wells. Melody will stay home to tend the kids. Did you reach a decision between the Hi-Power and Mark II?"

"She'll try the Hi-Power and your regular Mini-14."

"Melody seems to be timid."

"Shy, not timid; although one of the definitions of shy is actually timid. She just uncomfortable around people until she gets to know them. She's not easily frightened despite the fact that her shyness gives people that impression."

"I'm not a combat soldier and never was; more of a tin soldier. I do know that we have to watch our noise discipline. From here on out, no talking. We'll look in field manual 5.10 that I have on my computer and adopt those. If I raise my hand and clamp it into a fist, stop. If I pump it up and down go. If I need you go some direction, I'll point. Got it?"

"Yeah."

Off we went to meet Demolition Man; was that Sly or Wesley? Wait, it was Sly; they called him that for wrecking buildings while making arrests. I was thinking maybe the guy had been a SEAL or maybe an Army Demolitions Specialist, possibly a Green Be-

ret. We arrived at the location about six thirty, right on time. I used a lariat for a quick rope corral back in the woods a ways and we moved up to have an overview of the designated moving spot. I'd hung my gun belt on the saddle horn and left the Marlins and coach gun in their scabbards. As it was, I was loaded down.

I've never had the patience to just wait. Given a reasonable degree of uncertainty concerning Demolition Man, it was prudent to show up a little early. So there we were, prone, rifles pointed in the general direction of the specific meeting spot, building anxiety. Finally, 8am came without Demolition Man. He wasn't there at 8:15 or 8:30 and I decided to call it a day.

"Looks like he's not going to show. Let's get the horses and go home."

From behind us came a deep bass voice, chuckling. "I wondered how long you'd wait. I'm Demolition Man. You're Jack Black and you are?" he asked looking at David.

"Jose Cuervo."

"And Jack Black is good Kentucky bourbon?"

"Jack Black if very good Tennessee sipping whiskey."

"Prefer Single Barrel myself."

"When did you get here?"

"Five. Where are the supplies?"

"At my place."

"I figured that. Since you rode horses it can't be far. There's no Jack Black listed in the Cambridge phone listings, but that's understandable now. How about you get your horses and I'll get my Harley?"

"Question."

"Shoot."

"SEAL, Special Forces, Force Recon, what?"

"Uncle Sam's Misguided Children. You have the bearing of a military man, probably an NCO. Air Force no doubt."

"Why would you think Air Force?"

"No situational awareness. You wore the uniform but only shot at the firing range."

“Usually qualified Expert when the piece of crap M16 would cooperate.”

“At least you have a real rifle now. Smith, Devine, Fulton Armory, Springfield Armory or what?”

“Springfield Armory Super Match.”

“Nice scope.”

“Zeiss.”

“Oh, very nice scope. Barrett or what?”

“McMillan Tac-50 with the Night Force NXS 12-42x56mm and the Jet Suppressor.”

“You any good?”

“Not as good as Hathcock.”

“You’re all right for a fly boy. Get the horses and I’ll get my hog and meet you right here.”

“Are you just going to take him back to your place?”

“Five will get you ten he has a scabbard on his hog with some version of this rifle. He’s close to my age and probably carried one in Vietnam. Regardless of what a person thinks about Marines, they’re Riflemen. The M14 in all its versions is one of the finest, if not THE finest, rifle fielded by the American military. The Air Force had the M1 carbine until Curtis Lemay went for the M16.”

“You didn’t even ask his qualifications. What’s infantry know about explosives?”

“He wasn’t infantry after he got out. Besides, the Corps has Combat Engineers and Explosive Ordnance Disposal. I’m sure we’ll know what we need to know before he wants to put his hands on the explosives.”

It was more like a silent prayer. There was just something about the guy that made me trust him. Maybe it was his flattop haircut or the look in his eyes. He exuded confidence. We got back to the horses, I strapped my guns back on, slung the shotgun over my back and handed David the Super Match while I mounted. He handed me my rifle and his rifle and he mounted and we set off to the rendezvous point. Demolition Man was there astraddle a slightly chopped Harley and we headed down the road towards home.

On the way back, I had a word with David and had him call the shelter to tell Kristin to answer to Sapphire and to select some liquor based name for Melody. He whispered

back that they settled on Brandy. I chuckled and started to hum the song by Looking Glass. Apparently David had never heard the song because he really gave me a strange look.

*There's a port on a western bay
And it serves a hundred ships a day
Lonely sailors pass the time away
And talk about their homes*

*And there's a girl in this harbor town
And she works layin' whiskey down
They say "Brandy, fetch another round"
She serves them whiskey and wine*

*The sailors say "Brandy, you're a fine girl" (you're a fine girl)
"What a good wife you would be" (such a fine girl)
"Yeah your eyes could steal a sailor from the sea"
(dooda-dit-dooda), (dit-dooda-dit-dooda-dit)*

*Brandy wears a braided chain
Made of finest silver from the North of Spain
A locket that bears the name
Of the man that Brandy loves*

*He came on a summer's day
Bringin' gifts from far away
But he made it clear he couldn't stay
No harbor was his home*

*The sailor said " Brandy, you're a fine girl" (you're a fine girl)
"What a good wife you would be" (such a fine girl)
"But my life, my lover, my lady is the sea"
(dooda-dit-dooda), (dit-dooda-dit-dooda-dit)*

*Yeah, Brandy used to watch his eyes
When he told his sailor stories
She could feel the ocean foam rise
She saw its ragin' glory
But he had always told the truth, lord, he was an honest man
And Brandy does her best to understand
(dooda-dit-dooda), (dit-dooda-dit-dooda-dit)*

*At night when the bars close down
Brandy walks through a silent town
And loves a man who's not around
She still can hear him say*

*She hears him say " Brandy, you're a fine girl" (you're a fine girl)
"What a good wife you would be" (such a fine girl)
"But my life, my lover, my lady is the sea"
(dooda-dit-dooda), (dit-dooda-dit-dooda-dit)*

"Brandy, you're a fine girl" (you're a fine girl)

FADE

*"What a good wife you would be" (such a fine girl)
"But my life, my lover, my lady is the sea*

When we got home, I directed him to park his hog behind the storage building and had him follow us to the rear door of the barn. I grabbed my CB and told Kristin, "We're home."

"10-4."

We unsaddled the horses and I had more firearms than hands to carry them. DM offered to take the coach gun and two lever action rifles. Of course when I flipped up the hatch to the tunnel he got a strange look on his face.

"I'll hand them down to you."

"Uh, thanks."

I slung the Super Match over my right shoulder and descended after DM was down and had the firearms. The lighting in the tunnel was a string of those small incandescent bulbs, 15 watts, pink frosted, 20,000 hour life. Sort of a cross between white light and red light like they use on submarines, et al.

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The Purkinje effect occurs at the transition between primary use of the photopic (cone-based) and scotopic (rod-based) systems, that is, in the mesopic state: as intensity dims, the rods take over, and before color disappears completely, it shifts towards the rods' top sensitivity. The insensitivity of rods to long-wavelength light is related to the use of red lights under certain special circumstances – for example, in the control rooms of submarines, in research laboratories, or during naked-eye astronomy.

o

"Let's put the firearms away and I'll make introductions."

"Fine."

“This sweet thing is my other half Sapphire. The cute one over there is Jose’s other half, Brandy. The kids are down for naps.”

“Ladies. Nice to meet you.”

“Coffee?”

“Yes please, black. I suppose you want my bona fides? I took the standard training for the time and then was trained as a combat engineer. I excelled in blowing things up. So, when I got out of the Corps, I got involved in demolition. As of two years ago, I was current on the latest and greatest in the field of explosives. PETN has been around for a while and I am quite familiar with its application. As I understand it, you acquired a quantity recently from my favorite dealer?”

“We did. Blocks, sheets, shaped charges, a blasting machine, det cord and electric caps. I know squat about explosives beyond they go boom. We were going to wing it, but Sapphire told me about you. We weren’t using a nom de guerre before. At that, you wouldn’t found our listing, we’re unlisted and the phone is in Sapphire’s current last name, not the name she gave you.”

“Target’s?”

“The thought was to bottle them up by dropping bridges and overpasses.”

“Good idea. You’re going to be so popular with our forces when they want to use the same infrastructure elements.”

“There are plenty of roads going into Ames they can use.”

“And the Chinese can use to leave. I like the idea, with a qualification. We only blow those bridges and overpasses when they have some of those Chicoms’ on them. We can set the charges and some of our guys can set them off at the appropriate moment. We’re not setting off nukes here so we have several ways to set the caps off. Plus I collect blasting machines as a hobby.”

“Then you propose to set the charges and have each location manned to catch the Chinese flatfooted?”

“For as long as it takes them to wise up, yes. Eventually, probably after we’ve done it twice, they’ll be sending combat engineers ahead of the forces to clear the way. Now what can I give you in exchange for the explosives? There must be something you want that you don’t have. From the looks of that armory, it isn’t ammo.”

“We’re in really good shape as far as ammo goes. We saved the Hornady brass and got it reloaded. It shoots identically to the factory ammo. We have Mk 211 Raufoss but don’t

have any of that M1022 that matches it. That's probably a minor consideration... one of those nice to have things. What I'd really like is some LAW rockets and hand grenades."

"Why didn't you get them from whoever supplied you with the Mk 211?"

One Tin Soldier – Chapter 15

“We were doing one thing at a time. The guy was charging \$600 a can for the Raufoss and between it and other things, the source dried up before we got around to asking.”

“You get the stuff from Charlie?”

“You know Charlie?”

“Nope. I know about Charlie. Charlie wasn’t careful and so Charlie got caught. Couldn’t have been stuff for you, he had a load of M-67s.”

“Hand grenades?”

“Yeah. They brought those baseballs out around the same time as the M-61. Didn’t issue a lot early on. There were a few M-61s floating around, probably sitting on some shelf in a bunker collecting dust. They were, in some respects better than the M-67. The 61s used a segmented coil of wire inside. The 67s have a pattern inside to create fragments. Sometimes works, sometimes doesn’t. Now I can’t say where they came from, but if you were offered some, how many and which model would you want?”

“Two or three dozen of the M61s with the jungle clip, assuming someone had some.”

“But any port in a storm?”

“Yeah, something like that.”

“Now LAW rockets are a different story. Talley Industries made and still makes them. Most of the production comes from the company that developed the Raufoss. Do you remember the movie Commando that Arnold did? He had a M202A1 FLASH which used 4 LAW rockets in a quad carrier. They selected the AT4 to replace the M72. But Raufoss licensed and built them and they continued in service with other countries. Army junked the AT4 and went back to the M72 and added the Javelin. The Corps ordered 7,750 M72A7s for Iraq. If there were any laying around looking for a home, how many and how soon?”

“You know, four to six dozen hand grenades would be ideal. Two crates of the rockets would give us fifteen apiece. You should know that I paid for the explosives. If any or all of that stuff shows up behind the garage some morning, I sure wouldn’t shed any tears. Let’s go get the explosives from the storage building. How do you plan to get them to wherever you’re going?”

“Let me use your radio. Horny Toad, you there?”

“Ten four.”

“Ok, first place on the right after you cross the bridge. Bungalow, detached garage, storage building and a barn. It’s like you figured, bring both crates of LAWs and all of those grenades. Park behind the garage and we’ll unload there.”

“Copy, fifteen mikes.”

“Ok, let’s see the explosives.”

“They’re in the storage building and the caps are in the barn. Jose, you help him move the boxes and I’ll get the caps.”

By the time we had the explosives and caps sitting behind the garage there was Dodge dually at the gate. I lead him around behind the storage building rather than the garage and we started unloading the pickup.

“Each of the wooden crates contains three boxes of five rockets each. There are two dozen M-61s and the same of M67s. We included some you didn’t ask for, a dozen MK2A3 concussion and a dozen AN-M14 TH3 Incendiary. Don’t be wasteful; there won’t be any more.”

“Some way we can keep in touch?”

“Try 28.250 on ten meters or 14.150 on twenty meters. That should get me or Horny Toad most of the time. If someone else comes on ask for a weather report. *Fair sky early, rain by morning* will identify other members of our group. You did very well selecting the explosives. I take it you told the man what you wanted to do and he picked them out?”

“Actually, yes.”

“He was a combat engineer too. Liked to blow things up almost as much as I did. We worked together most of the time.”

“I suspected that. He used the term Chicom SOBs. I noticed you did too. Pretty thin to base an assumption on, but what the hell.”

“I suggest that you folks just stay out of the fight for the most part. If you must get involved, do it at long range. Quite the combo, a fly boy and a Deputy Sheriff.”

“Where did you get the idea Jose is a Deputy?”

“Well, I’m not blind and he’s on patrol. I have a good memory for faces. I’ve seen him several times. Come to think of it, Sapphire used the name Lawson. Related?”

“Not directly. It’s a long story.”

“Tell me sometime when we have the time. We’re gone.”

DM got on his hog and Horny Toad back in the pickup. I opened the gate and they turned east. David and I moved the crates and boxes into the storage building and locked it up. We returned to the shelter and proceeded to bring the Ladies up to date.

“It’s a shame the internet is down.”

“Why’s that?”

“You could send TOM an email and tell him you’re loaded for bear. Obviously the old saying is true. The only difference between men and boys is the price of their toys.”

“You’re probably right. Back when I was a kid, we played cowboys and Indians with cap guns. At the time I doubted I ever thought I own all of the Colts and Rugers. Or, for that matter, the Marlins. I suppose we even played war since WW II wasn’t the far in the past and Korea started when I was seven.”

“So, we’re just going to hole up here?”

“Like I said, he said if we had to get involved to do it at long range.”

“How do you propose to do that? You and I can snipe but we’d only have one observer.”

“The Canadians use three person teams. David will just have to spot for both of us. Do you think you could do that David?”

“I’ve never done it before.”

“We have a laser range finder and a 60 power spotting scope. The problem will be estimating windage. I didn’t cough up the money for the BORS from Barrett. That would have made the ranging easier but even that doesn’t help with windage. I have a course outline the Marine Corp uses. We can study that and get some range practice based on David’s estimates of windage and elevation. The range books have the elevation data we developed through trial and error and we can use that.”

“I’m game to give it a try. You said something about a Schmidt and Bender scope you could loan me for my rifle?”

“Yes, it was the first scope I had on my Super Match. When Kristin got her own Super Match and a Zeiss Victory Diavari 6 - 24x72mm I got a bit jealous and upgraded to the same scope. We already had ACOGs on the standard models so I put up the scope for later use.”

“That’s an expensive scope to just have in storage.”

“True. On the other hand, if one of the Zeiss scopes was damaged, we had an appropriate replacement that would only require minor adjustments to be right on the money.”

“I take it that neither of you have ever shot anyone?”

“There’s first time for everything. I’ve read that people’s reactions to killing someone for the first time vary widely from puking up their guts to the other extreme of cold acceptance.”

“I think most people’s reactions are similar to the first. Only a sociopath walks away without feelings. The problem with sociopaths is that there is no cure. Deputies forced to shoot someone are immediately placed in counseling. Even justified shootings leave some traces of feelings of guilt. I know of one Deputy who couldn’t cope with the feelings and resigned.”

“Have you been in that position?”

“Position? To an extent. I never had to pull the trigger. When there is an indication that the situation may call for lethal force, the weapons are presented.”

“Tomorrow, early? Let’s get that scope mounted on your rifle.”

The next day we went to the range and sighted in David’s scope. I felt very exposed during the process and would have given anything to have a suppressor to mount on his rifle. I made a note to ask DM if he had a suppressor for a M1A. There was enough wind to give us a chance to experiment with doping it out. It was light and variable, ranging from about 3mph to 8mph. It tended to increase later in the day but we didn’t want hang out at the range too long.

David had a new notebook and made copious notes about the number of clicks at various wind speeds for various ranges. The data would be applicable for both the Super Match rifles. Separate data were compiled for the Tac-50 out to 1,500 meters. Even with the data, there would be an element of judgment involved because under certain conditions the winds between the shooter and target could vary at different distances.

“DM called while you were out. He said to tell you everything was in place.”

“Thanks Melody. I’m going to call him and see if we can get a suppressor for David’s rifle.”

“Demolition Man, Jack Black.”

“Go ahead.”

“Got your message. Looking for a can for a M1A standard model.”

"I'll have to check. Ready to do some long distance work?"

"10-4. It would be better with the silencer."

"Give me twenty four hours. Demolition Man out."

"Good, you and I can take Melody to the range tomorrow and let Kristin keep an eye on your children. We need to get her up to speed on the Mini and the Browning."

"Give them to me and I walk her through dismantling, cleaning and reassembly. It would be nice if you could get me a suppressor. Would you listen to me? I'm supposed to uphold the law, not flaunt it."

"Unusual times, remember? I'll acquire it and loan it to you. Am I going to have trouble with you when this is all said and done?"

"No. You've had most of these things since you came back to Iowa and they haven't been a problem. I doubt they will be after this is over. When you're gone, I'll have to check for them since I know about them. I'm not going to bust a gut chasing down Kristin looking."

"Fair enough. I'll get the carbine and pistol."

"Jack Black, Demolition Man."

"Go ahead."

"Got lucky. Surefire with M1A adapter. One ounce of gold. Can do?"

"Where and when?"

"I'll come by shortly. First guy I asked had a spare."

"10-4."

"Here's the carbine and pistol. You can get started on the lessons and I'll go topside to meet DM."

"Oh, you're here."

"Yeah, I don't live that far away and the guy with the spare lives even closer. Do you have the flashhider alignment tool?"

"Yes, I got one from Fulton Armory when I got the match flashhidiers with the bayonet lugs that we have on our standard models."

“This is for Jose?”

“Yeah. I suppose I should tell you our real names.”

“I don’t want to know. What I don’t know, I can’t give up if I get caught and tortured. When we formed our group, we all agreed from the outset to only use the pseudonyms. It’s bad enough that I recognized him as a Deputy Sheriff. I think I’ve seen Sapphire somewhere before. A waitress, I think. I’d better get going. Those Chicoms pulled their aircraft out. Their troops have managed to breakout from the airport and are forming up to move out on foot with type 92 IFVs leading the way. They’re headed both north and south. They’re in for some nasty surprises. They have armor protection up through 12.7mm, so go for the people if you run into one. The M72 LAW should take one out if you dare get that close. And, keep you heads down.”

I took the box containing the Surefire suppressor back to the shelter and got out David’s M1A. I removed the flashhider and laid out what I’d need to install the adapter. The key part of the process, as far as I was concerned was the alignment. I accomplished that with the flashhider alignment tool and some of the supplies in the box the suppressor came in. Once I was satisfied with that, I attached the FA762 and checked the alignment. It was right on the money. If the adapter is properly aligned the suppressor is properly aligned.

We would need to take his rifle the next day and sight it in with the suppressor installed. The suppressor would cause a minor, repeatable shift in point of aim. Maybe we’d sight in the iron sights without the suppressor and the scope with the suppressor. The suppressor for the Mini was kept installed. The Browning suppressor was kept in a nylon case with ALICE clips and could be threaded on or left off, depending on the circumstances.

The charges were placed on the second bridge on south I-35 and the fourth bridge on north I-35. Both locations offered cover and concealment for people alongside the road. They had only brought in 4 IFVs (Type 86A) and we observed, two days later, a formation with one in front and the other at the rear with the body of soldiers in between. Each formation was led by the pathfinders that had parachuted in and secured the airport, six for each of the two formations.

The previous day we’d put Melody through the paces and she did surprisingly well with the Mini. She didn’t like the blast from the Browning and we installed the suppressor. Although the suppressor didn’t really change much, she did much better with it installed. I dug around and found an old surplus 1911 military flap holster and cut the end out. It would be awkward but workable.

We’d received a short call on the radio the evening before giving us an estimated time of departure. How they knew that was beyond me but we planned accordingly. Keeping in mind that we weren’t to get close, we chose the Super Matches plus the Tac-50. I would carry the Tac-50 and the Super Match with ammo. David would carry my ten

spare .50 caliber magazines and his rifle, rangefinder and spotting scope. Kristin would carry her Super Match, ammo and 590A1 with 50 rounds including what was in the shotgun. We each had our handgun of choice with four spare magazines.

As we came into the area where the mined bridge was, we were met by Horny Toad who took us to a location they had checked out. He gave David a slip of paper with ranges written on it and as soon as he was in position, David confirmed the ranges. They were right on. We were none too soon because less than an hour later we could hear the IFV fire up and start rolling.

Their pathfinders led the way, checking for IEDs and demolitions. They either didn't notice or DM had done his job well, the charges weren't spotted. With men on foot, the formation wasn't moving very fast and it began to bunch up. By the time they reached the bridge, everyone except for the pathfinders were somewhere on the bridge. There was an explosive crack and the bridge simply folded up.

Some of the soldiers closest to the IFVs were struck by the IFV nearest them while some were able to ride the bridge down. They were shaken but not out of commission. With David calling targets and ranges, we made sighting adjustments and fired. Given the density of the Chinese troops, it was possible to adjust using Kentucky windage. I put down nine of the first ten I shot at with the Tac-50 and replaced the empty second magazine with one with Mk 211. There was diesel fuel leaking and I fired at each vehicle until either the sparks or incendiary started the fuel burning.

I set aside the Tac-50 and switched to my Super Match. The troops were still on their feet, albeit behind concealment, but fading fast. I went through two magazines with my Super Match and reloaded as the firing came to a halt. I paused for a few moments.

"I'm moving up there to see if we got them all," I said as I rose.

"No...wai..." I heard Kristin say as I was slammed to the ground by a tremendous shove against my shoulder. I must have hit my head when I fell, my vision faded.

I was in the worst fight of my life. We were surrounded by the NVA and I was so thirsty. I mumbled, "Water," and my eyes opened. I tried to clear my vision and focus on my surroundings, my eyes refusing to cooperate. "Water," I uttered yet again. A light snapped on blinding me. I shaded my eyes and looked around. I was in our bed in the shelter.

"Only a sip," Kristin said as she held the water bottle with the built in straw. "You've been hurt."

"What happened?"

"You got up to go check to see if we got them all. I tried to tell you to wait, but the bullet was already in the air. One man had a Russian rifle in 7.62x54mmR. I don't remember

the name the DM told me. You were hit in the right shoulder and some bones were shattered. Primarily the ball although the socket was damaged too. You need shoulder joint replacement surgery. DM is working on trying to get that set up for you. It would have to be done on an inpatient basis, probably at Methodist or Mercy Hospital. It's a complex procedure requiring a surgical team and four days of hospitalization, one before and two after, excluding the day of the surgery. For now, your shoulder is immobilized and I have pain medication."

"Dragunov rifle. Did we get them all?"

"Yes. David shot the SOB who shot you."

"I know I killed several people but I don't think I want to know how many."

"You even got a few with those two diesel fires you started. Everyone who participated got their share. The northbound formation was also stopped. That bridge dropped a lot further than the one we were at. You know which bridge I mean?"

"The long curved one? Ouch."

"DM and the others recovered what ordnance they could. It wasn't much due to the fire. The northbound vehicles didn't burn and more was recovered there. He said to tell you that if your shoulder didn't heal up right, they'd have to take back the rockets and grenades."

"This hurts."

"Try not to move too much. You've been on morphine and will now be on a very strong pain pill with specific limitations. You can't have one for two hours."

"Could I have some more water?"

"Do you want me to help you to sit up?"

"I couldn't support myself."

"I have pillows. I'll get David."

"I'll help you Jason and Kristin will slide in the pillows behind you. Grit your teeth, this is going to hurt."

"Boy, you weren't lying about that. Are the missions over or are there more?"

"They're over. Why?"

“I was going to suggest you use my Super Match until I can get around and use it myself.”

“About that. There’s no guarantee that you’ll be able to use a rifle in the future. It depends on the outcome of the surgery and we don’t know yet when they can do the surgery.”

“Why?”

“Both hospitals have limited power and surgery is very limited because of it.”

“What’s that noise?”

“The ham radio.”

They had moved the radio into the bedroom so I could follow the descriptions of the fighting on amateur radio. It’s kind of blurry due to the pain medication, but the end run China had tried was *Operation Red Dawn*, our name not theirs, and had failed miserably. One theory getting a lot of support was that the original movie had given people pause for thought and when it happened for real, they were far better prepared than the characters in the movie. One ham fractiously suggested it might have been different if they’d had William Smith on their side. He is fluent in English, Russian, German, French and Serbo-Croatian. (He got great reviews for *Red Dawn*) If the action had involved Russians and Cubans, he might have had a point.

Most of the action was on the border rather on the coast. One of the reasons suggested was that it was easier to blow through a fence than effect D-Day type amphibious landings. As good as the border wall was it didn’t stand up well to 125mm cannon shells. US ground forces were located on or near the border and Airborne assets at the various airports behind the battle lines.

Despite the high numbers of SAMs deployed by the Chinese, the Apache and Cobra gunships supplemented with retrofitted UH-1 Huey’s armed with Dillon Aero M134D Mini guns took a tremendous toll. The guns, which can be setup to fire either 3,000rpm or 4,000rpm had been equipped with the 4k motors and each Huey carried two guns and four 4,400 round ammo cans. One ham who had talked to a gunner reported that cutting the Chinese soldiers down was like mowing grass.

Troops were never assigned to come to the Midwest to deal with *Operation Red Dawn*. Unlike the movie, it was over almost before it got started. There were Patriots everywhere and not all those AR-15s were semi auto either. It would seem that some folks didn’t like certain portions of the law and had acquired all the necessary M-16 components to go with their pre-81 auto sears. Possession of any M-16 components was illegal in Iowa, excluding the magazines. Possession of an auto sear and an AR-15 was illegal in Iowa. David tried to explain it to me, but I dozed off.

“David paid us for the suppressor.”

“Where did he get an ounce of gold?”

“He didn’t say and I didn’t ask. I suspect he gathered up his share of the Chinese weapons and ordnance and sold it to raise the money. He’s our ally, not our enemy. He and DM went back to Nevada and got the rest of those radios and they programmed them and every member of the group ended up with one mobile and one portable minimum. It seems that David finally remembered where he knew DM from. He won’t say anything about it. I got the impression that whatever he figured out was good.”

“If I’d only kept my head down for a few more minutes...this could have all been avoided.”

“If anyone ever had a doubt about your courage, you showed them what you’re made of. I’ve been thinking and the next time you ask, I think I’ll say yes.”

“Are you talking about marriage?”

“As a matter of fact yes.”

“Will you marry me Kristin?”

“I’d be honored Jason.”

“This was hell of a way to convince you.”

“Totally unrelated to you’re getting shot. It was more about how you handled yourself though all the recent events. Well, starting with the volcanoes through the present. You have more perseverance than any two men I’ve ever known. You just get the bit in your teeth and don’t stop until you accomplish whatever goal you’re seeking. And you respected my wishes not to get married and only brought it occasionally.”

“Jack Black, Demolition Man.”

“Go ahead.”

“You’re awake. When did that happen?”

“During the last hour.”

“Hot damn. That is going to make this call all the more important.”

“What’s up?”

One Tin Soldier – Chapter 16

“We’ll be picking you up in the morning to take you to Iowa Methodist Medical Center. Surgery is scheduled for the day after. They got sets of replacement components from University Hospital in Iowa City. Due to the nature of the injury, they may use a European replacement joint they’re evaluating because it eliminates most the related pain. It’s FDA approved but isn’t used often. They will decide which option to use after they get inside. There’s a good physical therapist in Ames at Mary Greeley.”

The next morning on the way to Des Moines DM showed me pictures of the two devices. The American device replaced the ball with a metal ball and the socket with a plastic socket. The European device replaced the socket with a ball and the ball with a socket. Both devices were very reliable. The 40mg Oxycontin were the minimum to mask the pain and left me slightly loopy. Once I was in the hospital, I was poked, prodded, subjected to an MRI and had extensive lab work performed.

“Mr. Jones, when did you become aware that you’re slightly diabetic?”

“That’s first I’ve heard about it.”

“Post-surgery, we’ll begin a treatment regimen probably using Actos or Avandia. If that fails, we’ll probably switch to Avandaryl. Actos and Avandia make the cells more responsive to the natural insulin your body produces. The Amaryl component causes the pancreas to release more insulin. There’s also Avandamet which combines Avandia and Metformin. We may have to experiment to determine which works best. If we go that way, it will probably be Avandamet. Has my colleague explained the surgical process?”

“Yes.”

“An anesthesiologist will be by to discuss what he needs to know to make the proper decisions about which anesthetics he’ll use. A nurse will come in after with the consent forms. You’ve been taking 40 mg Oxycontin?”

“Since I woke up, I have. I think they used morphine before. Question?”

“Yes?”

“I’m a shooter. How will this affect my ability to shoot?”

“That’s an unknown. A lot of it relates to the success of the surgery and how well you do in physical therapy. It could range from 50% mobility to about 95% which has no bearing on the answer. There is also the possibility of ongoing pain. We’ll do the best we can to restore function to your shoulder and eliminate sources of pain.”

While I waited for the anesthesiologist and later the nurse, I recalled the dream I had been having as I came to. It was very strange. I had never served in Vietnam and certainly wasn't recalling a personal experience. And yet, I distinguished the opposing forces as being NVA and not Viet Cong. We were surrounded. Was I thinking about Ia Drang or Khe Sanh? The more I thought about it, I realized it was Ia Drang under the command of Hal Moore.

For some reason, I had focused on the movie starring Mel Gibson, but why? I hadn't been there and the movie couldn't have possibly shown the real horror of what happened there. Then, I recalled reading about Bruce Crandall, a Huey pilot. He got the CMH for his actions that day. It wasn't presented until 2007 by George W. Bush. I recalled reading about the battle on Wiki and seeing the picture of Crandall's Huey. He was one brave SOB and very, very lucky. Why that information popped into my head as I began to come to might forever remain a mystery. The anesthesiologist arrived and started asking questions.

The nurse brought the papers, asked if I had any questions and then had me sign here, here and here. I was prescribed a mild sedative to help me sleep and early the next morning they woke me up to give me a pill to help me sleep. I know... it doesn't make a lot of sense. I was the first of two scheduled surgeries that morning and they wheeled me in early. The anesthesiologist slipped a needle into my IV once I was arranged on the table and I came to in recovery, six hours later. I couldn't see much other than bandages. One of the surgeons put in an appearance and asked if I was fully awake and how I felt.

"It hurts a little and I'm a little groggy. How did it go?"

"Better than anticipated. As good as they are, MRIs don't always tell the full story. We replaced the ball. The socket wasn't as damaged as the MRI showed but we replaced it anyway. We think it was due to a bone fragment from the head of the humerus. You should recover nicely. Do the recommended physical therapy and you may regain nearly full use of your shoulder and arm within a year."

"When do I get out? I have a wedding to attend."

"One of your grandchildren?"

"No. Me. For the first time no less."

"There's someone waiting to see you. The intended bride?"

"If she's in her late fifties that could be."

"How did it go?"

"I didn't feel a thing. The doctor said it wasn't quite as bad as they thought. I may regain full use of my arm and shoulder. Did you find someone to marry us?"

"About that. Getting a license could be a problem at the moment. Since we've lived together all these years, if we say we're married, we're married. I bought a set of plain gold bands."

"Oh, ok. I can't remember all the promises, but consider them made."

"And I make the same promises. Hold out your left hand."

She slipped the ring on my finger and handed me the ring to put on her finger. Iowa, obviously, has laws governing common law marriage and we were now married in the eyes of the law. Other than the fact that we did everything backwards, lived together for all those years and then got married, everything was as it should be. DM had made arrangements at Mary Greeley Hospital in Ames for me to receive physical therapy and that would commence once the stitches were removed. Kristin changed the bandages per instructions and I finally got a look. I'd have a nasty scar.

"They're pulling out."

"Who, from where?"

"The Chinese have pulled the few remaining troops from the west coast and are moving their remaining forces to Mexican ports."

"You know what that means, GTW."

"I don't think so."

"Why not DM?"

"They surrendered, officially. The US agreed to supply our excess grain to help feed their population. We're going to get some of those dollars back."

"That could take forever."

"Not with corn selling for seven dollars a bushel. No one else in the world will take US dollars at the moment."

"I take that some news sources are available now?"

"They came back up while you were in the coma. We all forgot to mention it and put the ham radio in the bedroom instead of the AM radio. Russia pushed through the Baltic States and ran into the proverbial brick wall when they tried to invade Poland. It was a tank battle that rivaled the Battle of Kursk. This time, the Russians lost. Probably for the

same reason that they won the original, defenses ten layers deep, massive air campaign, tanks better than theirs that knew of the strategy they employed in the original battle. They withdrew their remaining forces and there have been no threats made concerning a strategic retaliation.”

“Huh?”

“No missiles coming over the arctic. The war is already being referred to as World War Three. Despite the potential for a very large army, the Chinese used less than a million troops because they had insufficient resources to feed a larger army. The government is making an all-out effort to restore the infrastructure. One other thing you might find interesting and then I’ll have to go. The President, with the backing of Congress, ordered the UN out of the US. He gave them three months to clear out about four months ago. They’re all gone. France and Belgium are vying to host the reassembled UN. Anyway, I’ve got to go. Congratulations. It’s about time you two got married. I remember where I knew her from. The Maid Rite in Ankeny, Kristin Wells.”

“What’s your name?”

“You’re not going to believe me when I tell you, but it’s John Smith.”

Smith is the most common surname in the US and the second most common in Canada.

I was really beginning to feel my age due to the injury to my shoulder. For the next six months we made a daily trip to Ames for physical therapy, seven days a week. After that, it was cut to three times a week and eventually, eliminated. I was ready to go to the range and see if I could still shoot. Well, I could still shoot, the real question was could I deal with the recoil. I started with my Mini and it wasn’t too bad, a NSAID was sufficient to deal with the discomfort. I moved up to my Super Match and the number of Ibuprofen tablets increased to three. My 870 also was in the three tablet range and the Tac-50 called for four.

What it finally came down to was I could shoot if it was necessary. The Story County Sheriff had never implemented his militia plans. He did do one rather surprising thing. Those people that he’d talked to about it who had actually passed the firearms testing were assembled into a force of Reserve Deputies. We had the same badges except the word ‘Reserve’ was prominently featured. We got the whole nine yards, Department ID, badge and carry case. All featuring ‘Reserve’ prominently. We would be activated for such things as Amber Alerts, crowd control and things where presence was required above the available regular Deputies. We weren’t the only seniors in the group, either. Everyone had a military background. I went looking and the LAW rockets and hand grenades were missing except for the Mk3A2s and our own smoke grenades.

There was an explanation offered concerning the average age of the Reserve Deputies being around 55. In a word, patience. Many of the situations where the Reserves were

activated would be those situations where patience was called for. That applied equally to crowd control as it did to BOLOs for the Amber Alerts. We were classified as peace officers and allowed to carry 24/7 in many places where only LEOs were allowed to carry firearms.

As a concession to our advancing ages we acquired Glock 21SFs and Glock 30s. I could either go with my Miami Classic rig or the paddle holster for the 21. I bought a new paddle holster for the G21 and an ankle holster for the G30. Kristin opted for a Miami Classic for her 21 when she wasn't carrying her Galco purse and the same ankle holster I selected. The ankle holster carried the pistol and one magazine on the off side. The other ankle sported a dual magazine pouch.

Her Miami Classic had a dual magazine holder on the off side and she carried no additional magazines. I carried two paddle style double magazine pouches behind the pistol on my right side. We also carried handcuffs, primarily to supply the Deputies.

David came away from the affair with Corporal stripes on his sleeves, designating him as a training Deputy. They moved back to Kelley and he had an excavator putting in a hole in his backyard for a shelter, the size of ours. Apparently he had studied what we had and decided to duplicate it. They also elected to stop their family at two children. They were already on septic and he had a well drilled. Two friends of his helped him lay the block for the shelter and the outside tunnel.

He didn't get a pre-built garage, electing instead to build his own, again with the help of friends. It took two and one half years for him to complete the process. They had two one year deluxe food supplies on hand and were now concentrating on adding a third. Meanwhile he continued to pack five gallon food pails with bulk purchases of things like corn, wheat, oats, beans and rice. He didn't count those preparations as part of their inventory although they probably represented another full year for four people.

Kristin and I continued to have the .50 caliber brass reloaded by the same man who had done the first reloads. Because of my shoulder, she was the primary sniper with the Tac-50 and I was her spotter. We continued to work out to maintain our muscle tone although it was getting harder. We had to shut down the Kohler for an engine and alternator rebuild and were relying on the QD12.5 to assist recharging the submarine batteries. The dealer picked it up, hauled it to Des Moines and returned it ten days later, claiming it was 'as good as new'.

"Do you think we're finally going to have some peace and quiet Jason?"

"Lord, I hope so Kristin. But you know that TOM always claims that bad things happen in threes. I hope he's wrong about that. I sort of figured he'd spend his time writing stories and post them when the internet and Frugal's came back up. I haven't seen any if he's posted them."

"He just posted one."

“What’s the title?”

“I don’t recall. It involves an asteroid strike. I downloaded it.”

“He reworked *The Rock*?”

“No, it doesn’t involve the Three Amigos.”

“It’s past time David and I made a trip to Bethany, I’m getting low.”

“How low?”

“Down to 30 cartons.”

“How many do you intend to buy?”

“As many as I can get for two grand. I do want to keep some cash on hand, just in case.”

“How many cartons is two thousand dollars?”

“About fifty.”

“I wouldn’t want you to run out, buy five thousand dollars’ worth.”

“Are you sure? That 125 cartons.”

“It’s your only major vice and as long as you don’t smoke in the house or blow smoke in my face, I can live with it.”

“I know it gives me bad breath and the smell of the smoke clings to my clothes. But I’ve smoked so long I’m not sure I can give up the habit.”

“I’m going to give you some extra money and I want you to stop at the liquor stores either in Des Moines or in Ames.”

“What do you want?”

“Several cases. One each of Jack Black, Single Barrel, Jose Cuervo 1800, Bombay Sapphire gin, Absolute vodka, Chivas Regal and a mixed case containing Grand Marnier, sweet and dry vermouth, Drambuie and other things we need to make cocktails. How about I add to that and you get a case of bourbon? TOM has mentioned Maker’s Mark.”

“We still have liquor left from the last time we bought and that seems like forever ago. What’s going on?”

“I would like to be in a position where we wouldn’t have to leave here for any reason whatsoever for a period of five years.”

“Ok, I take more money and buy extra cigarettes. I’ll need a minimum of 260 cartons if I limit myself to a carton a week.”

“I thought you only smoked a pack a day. That’s only 37 cartons a year.”

“It’s more like a carton a week.”

“Will you be able to get that many cigarettes?”

“I’m pretty sure I can. Two hundred thirty cartons will run over nine grand. The liquor you want is the expensive stuff. I’m going to take three bundles of Ben Franklins.”

“How many do we have in the safe?”

“Five bundles, fifty thousand.”

“Good, I’m going to hookup the trailer to the Comet and head for Costco, Sam’s and Hy-Vee. Fill in a few holes here and there.”

“I’ll call David.”

“David, Jason. When is your next full day off? Tomorrow? Outstanding. Do you have any commitments? Oh, I’m driving down to Bethany and getting several cases of cigarettes. I thought if you were free, you might like to ride along and get some for yourself. Yes, I’ll wait while you ask Melody. You can? Great. I’ll pick you up around eight.”

“Kristin, are you sure you want to try and tow that trailer with your Comet?”

“Why not? There won’t be that much weight and it’s not like I have to drive through mountains to get to West Des Moines. I’ll take it easy. The towing speed limit is 55 so I’ll probably keep it to 50 in the far right lane.”

It took us two hours to get to Bethany and an hour to talk the store manager into letting me buy 270 cartons of Kool’s. He had them; he wasn’t sure it was legal. I think the Iowa plate on my F-100 made him leery. Since I was taking delivery in Missouri, he decided I was within my rights and set out the cases of Kool’s. I pulled a bundle of 100s and ask how much. He gave me the total and I removed enough 100s from the bundle to cover the purchase and leave me with a small amount of change.

“Count ‘em if you want, it was a full bundle.”

“You’d better believe I’m going to count it. Mary, come over here and recount as I hand you a bundle of \$1,000.”

They actually did it twice. Then he begrudgingly gave me my change and David proceeded to buy 30 cartons of Camel filters. We had stopped at a few liquor stores on the way down and I had the miscellaneous case right off the bat. Iowa used to have state stores but during the 80s they licensed retailers and closed their stores. These retailers typically had a larger supply than the state stores, except when it came to the high priced liquor.

“Are you planning on going on a lifetime drunk?”

“Just following orders David. This was Kristin’s idea, not mine. We still have a little of the liquor we bought way back when. I asked and she said, *I would like to be in a position where we wouldn’t have to leave here for any reason whatsoever for a period of five years.* That’s a verbatim quote.”

“What set her off?”

“TOM posted a new story about an asteroid strike. She said it isn’t the same as *The Rock* that he wrote way back when.”

“If he posted a new story he must have made it through all of the happenings.”

“You’re right. I never thought about that. I read a few pages of *The Rock* and that was when he was writing the Three Amigos series. They ended up in a cave near Carlsbad Caverns. I didn’t read the whole story.”

“It’s fiction, right?”

“Yes, he writes PAW fiction. Probably half of his story is getting his main characters in a position where they are ready for come what may. Then, as soon as the dust settles, his characters begin salvage operations. Kristin copied the story to Word but I haven’t time to read it yet.”

“How much liquor are you planning on buying?”

“One each of Jack Black, Single Barrel, Jose Cuervo 1800, Bombay Sapphire gin, Absolute vodka, Chivas Regal and a mixed case containing Grand Mariner, sweet and dry vermouth, Drambuie and other things we need to make cocktails. Again, that’s a direct quote.”

“What do you drink the most of?”

“Jack Black.”

“That’s probably cheaper than any of the others, why not two cases of that?”

“No reason I can think of. That might be a good idea. I’ll need to corner the market on Squirt, though.”

“You prefer Jack Daniels with Squirt?”

“The regular black label and Gentleman Jack. If you get thirsty, stop by, we should be able to mix 90% of the drinks in The Bartender’s Guide.”

“You must not have Gentleman Jack on your list; you’ve passed it up three times.”

“The Single Barrel is usually taken neat or on the rocks. In a mixed drink I can’t tell Jack Black from Gentleman Jack.”

“What’s the difference?”

“Jack is run through the maple charcoal once and Gentlemen Jack twice. Other mixes will come from the grocery store, like Margarita mix, Collins mix, Seven-up, Ginger ale, tonic and Coke. Damn, I forgot the Myers rum. I’d better get a split case of the light and dark. Plus she said to get a case of Maker’s Mark.”

“So, some of everything?”

“Probably a lifetime supply. Since beer doesn’t keep beyond a certain time, we’ll have to buy that to go with the pizzas. I’ll look for Carlings and when I can’t find it settle for Coors as I always do. I think Carlings was a Canadian beer that is now marketed in the UK, South Africa and Australia.”

“You’re well versed on alcoholic beverages.”

“I know what I like; it’s as simple as that. Kristin generally drinks Tom Collins but she tried a sip of the Single Barrel and became a true convert. I don’t drink much bourbon or scotch. Canadian products are good; I’ll look for some Crown Royal.”

“Do you have Cuban Cigars to go with the good booze?”

“They’re embargoed. I might just get a mixed case of Crown Royal and some sort of Brandy. Better split that case three ways and include some Kalúha.”

“We’d better finish this up before you remember other things you forgot like crème de menthe and crème de cacao.”

“Good idea. I’ll find something else to fill out the case of Crown Royal. Maybe some of the fancy things like Frangelica, Benedictine, Tia Maria and Baileys Irish Crème.”

“Thanks for coming along David. Do you see what I mean about the cigarette store?”

“I was there once, remember?”

“Oh that’s right. You got me a carton of Kool’s and a carton of Marlboros.”

“Is there anything to be concerned about with that story you mentioned?”

“He’s surprisingly accurate on some things and totally misses the mark on others. Keep your powder dry and continue with your preps as money permits.”

“Why?”

“Oh, bad things happen in threes.”

“Hogwash.”

“Believe whatever you want. How are your preps coming?”

“All we need is a generator.”

“Would you be interested in our QD12.5?”

“How many hours does it have on it?”

“Eight thousand or less. You could get it checked out before you decide. I’ll let it go for five thousand.”

“What do they cost new?”

“I gave \$9,650 plus tax. The 100amp ATS was extra and we do have quite a few filters. I followed the maintenance schedule to the letter. It’s a fair price. We can carry you if you can come up with two thousand down.”

“I’ll have to talk to Melody”

“Smart man. Either way, let me know.”

“I will. Thanks for the ride. It was an enlightening experience.”

I wonder what he meant about it being enlightening. Kristin was halfway through unloading the trailer and hadn’t touched the car with its full trunk and back seat.

One Tin Soldier – Chapter 17

“Find everything you were looking for?”

“And then some. I’ve been unloading it and sorting it into two piles; one for the basement and one for the shelter. If you want to help, you can take the shelter pile down and add it to the shelves. Everything go ok on your trip?”

“Ended up getting extra liquor as things came to mind. Did you get mixes?”

“I didn’t have time. We can do that tomorrow.”

“Is this all because of TOM’s new story?”

“Not particularly. It does relate to one thing he brings up a lot. You know, bad things happen in threes.”

“It took David to point it out to me but his posting of that story would seem to indicate he survived.”

“Why wouldn’t he? Only three nukes were used against the US, all HEMPs. The San Andreas didn’t let loose when Cascadia slipped so barring something unforeseen, he should be fine. The tuff pattern did include a portion of California where he lives. Fox reported that it didn’t amount to much.”

“I may send him an email after all. I can do that through Frugal’s, I checked.”

“Do it later, I want to get everything unloaded and put up tonight.”

“What about what I brought back?”

“Put the liquor in the basement and the cigarettes in the tunnel to the armory.”

“Did you give any thought to supper?”

“Maid Rites and French fries, I’m bushed and don’t feel like cooking.”

I got the appliance caddy and hauled the liquor to the bungalow and by hand down the steps to the basement. The cigarettes were next and went into the tunnel between the shelter and the armory. Finally I began transporting the things she’d bought and sorted to be put into the shelter. We left the goods for the basement on the patio. We ate, showered and were asleep by the time our heads hit the pillow.

Over breakfast the following day, I asked, “If we get the odds and ends done this morning, would you like to go riding?”

“I was going to suggest going to Adel to bring back the canning jars, rings and plastic lids. We should see how much hay and straw they have that they’ll sell us. They may have enough grain to refill the loft in the barn. If we get back early enough, we can go riding; otherwise we’ll make a point of doing it tomorrow. The day after, we’re going to have to till the garden. I want to go big this year like we did the first time.”

“Ok, what’s bothering you?”

“I don’t know. I know that something is but I can’t put my finger on it.”

“Are you sure it isn’t that story?”

“Can’t be, I haven’t read it beyond the first half dozen pages. I remember back in 2010 when you had the same thing happen. Something was bothering you that you couldn’t put your finger on.”

“With the two of us, Edgar Cayce doesn’t have a chance. After whatever it is happens, I’m sure someone will find a Quatrain to show we were warned by Nostradamus.”

“You left out Jean Dixon, one of the Reagan’s soothsayers. Let me mull on it, I’m sure it will come to me. I can tell you flat out Jason, I’m not thinking about an asteroid strike.”

Kristin had a tone in her voice that suggested we drop the matter. I was usually the one who got the feeling in my gut that something was coming that would be a challenge to get through. I sensed nothing. I should have listened to news closer. There are those triplets again, shoulda, coulda and woulda. I tended to the stock while she cleaned up the kitchen. I put two coolers with a jug of ice each in the back of the pickup because she hadn’t said what the odds and ends were beyond the mixers. It dawned on me that we had the room for a small bar in the living room. Very small. While she pondered her feeling, I pondered what I might want in the way of a bar. The vacant space on the wall was 37” wide so it would most likely be something 36” wide. Just big enough for the liquor and a set of bar glasses. Have to get a shaker with a strainer and some shot glasses. I’m sure I’d seen a set somewhere.

We moved the previous day’s purchases from the patio to the basement. It was mostly shelf stable food like pasta with a shelf life of ten centuries if it were kept dry and protected from critters. We had two stacks of nestled 5 gallon food grade pails to store the stuff in. In fact, it looked to me like we wouldn’t need to shop for groceries for years. I didn’t remember seeing butter, bacon or hams and I’d put everything away.

“Ready?”

“Yep. Where do we stop first?”

“Hy-Vee for soft drinks they have on sale and mixes they carry. I see you put in the coolers. Good, I didn’t get some things at Costco yesterday.”

“Hams, butter and bacon?”

“You read minds?”

“No, I put everything in the shelter and basement.”

“The Black Angus place is picking up the steer to butcher, cut and wrap. I want to stop at Sears and see about an upright freeze for the kitchen. I’d much prefer a chest type but there isn’t room in the basement or the shelter.”

“We could put it in the storage building.”

“We could, couldn’t we? I’ll think about it.”

“Hang on a minute; I think I’d better take the trailer, just in case.”

“Just in case what?”

“Just in case we forgot something else.”

“Good, we can get another cooler. The ones we have are 100 quart. We should get a 250 quart and I know just where to go.”

“I’ll get two more ice jugs.”

I hooked up the trailer, transferred the two coolers to the trailer and added two extra jugs to one of the coolers.

“Anything else or are we ready?”

“We’re ready.”

The first stops were two Hy-Vee stores in Ankeny plus a stop at the Maid Rite. The French fries, tenderloins and Maid Rite meat filled one cooler and the second part way. Another store in Ankeny had the 250 quart Igloo and she bought two. I wasn’t excited yet; we need ham, bacon and butter. Of course that meant a trip to Costco. We filled both of the new coolers plus the partially full 100 quart. Naturally, the stops at Hy-Vee weren’t limited to soft drinks and mixes, it included garnishes.

“Ok, next stop is Sears Merle Hay. I think we’ll go with the chest freezer and put it the storage building. We’ll have them deliver it.”

“Question.”

“Go ahead.”

“Russia pulled out after their defeat at the Polish border, right?”

“That’s what they said on the news. At the moment the US isn’t involved in any wars. Does that have something to do with what’s bothering you?”

“I’m not sure. Possibly. Have you ever known the Russians to back off?”

“Sure, the Cuban Missile Crisis.”

“Excluding that.”

“They pulled out of Afghanistan.”

“But we didn’t help NATO defeat the Russians, did we?”

“We had problems of our own.”

“Did we bring all of our tactical nukes home when we left Europe?”

“I would assume so. The only time the weapons are supposed to be out of our possession is when they’re actually deployed.”

“Supposed to be?”

“Yeah. We’ve discussed this.”

“Not with me you didn’t.”

“Oh, it was with David.”

“What did you discuss?”

“We have weapons sharing through NATO. Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey have been provided nuclear weapons to deploy and store. This involves pilots and other staff of the ‘non-nuclear’ NATO states practicing, handling, and delivering the US nuclear bombs, and adapting non-US warplanes to deliver US nuclear bombs. Canada and Greece have opted out of the weapons sharing. Apparently the US nuclear weapons based in Europe are in the sole possession and under constant and complete custody and control of the United States.”

“A long time ago I read somewhere that those sharing nations might not give up the nukes if the US pulled out.

“Schlesinger wanted to know if the US nuclear weapons were secure and asked his director of telecommunications and command and control systems, Thomas C. Reed, if

he could talk to the US officers holding the keys to the weapons. Reed reported back that the US custodians were in charge, but at one Air Force base 'things got a little dicey. The local Army troops outside the fence wanted in. Their Air Force countrymen inside wanted them kept out. The nukes on alert aircraft were hastily returned to bunkers as the opposing commanders parleyed under a white flag. Soon both sides went off to dinner, but through it all we held our breath.'

"When the wall fell, non-Soviet Warsaw Pact countries were formally removed from the US strategic nuclear war plan (SIOP), requiring adjustments to the theater strike plans for the tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. One year later, by the time of the INF deadline in June 1991, less than 2,500 US nuclear weapons were left in Europe, 1,400 of which were air-delivered bombs.' For some reason, the number 480 sticks in my mind. I think it was the number of stored bombs from 1994 through 2004."

"So what you're implying is that the 480 shared weapons are still shared and not under US control?"

"It's a thought. We're here. There's a parking space over there where the pickup and trailer will fit."

She bought the 25ft³ chest freezer for delivery in three days. With that out of the way, we went north on Merle Hay and picked up I-80/I-35. We took I-80 west and exited US 169 North, switched to two local roads and pulled into the farm. She was all business, almost as if she were on a mission. The straw was last year's straw but it was only bedding. The alfalfa was the first cutting this year. Her brothers were happy to unload the straw but not the hay.

When she offered above market for the hay and grain they changed their minds. They even offered to take the back roads and bring a grain elevator. They would start with the grain and bring a truckload each of shell corn and oats. If that wasn't enough, they go back for more and fill the loft 'to the rafters'. Man, I hope the loft will support that much weight. After we were fixed up on grain, they'd bring the entire first cutting of hay and all the straw we could stack. She peeled off several Ben Franklins for a down payment. The agreed price was \$150/ton on the hay and much less for the straw.

We had pallets to stack the hay and straw on. These were the set surrounding the barn and a second set in the only free space left on our 2½ acres. By the time they finished, they were using the grain elevator to move bales of hay and straw to the top of the pile. I had to get an extension ladder to tarp the pile after they left. Her brothers still used the old twine square baler with a bale chute feeding bales to the wagon it towed. It wasn't broke so they didn't fix it. Most of the farmers had switched to the large round bales but they were some holdouts. I like the bales because they were so much easier to handle.

Sears showed up with the freezer while I was on top of the pile of hay spreading out the tarps. I had cleared a spot next to an outlet for the freezer and Kristin directed them to that location so I didn't have to climb down. Let me tell you, by the time I had the hay

and straw tarped, I felt like, 'come and go breath, I'm too tired to help ya.' This aging stuff is for the birds.

The next day, the Angus Beef place called and told us our order was ready for pickup. After lunch, I put the four coolers in the back of the pickup and we went to pick it up. The meat would be frozen brick solid and I didn't bother with ice jugs, preferring to have the extra room. When we picked up a side, the two 100 quart coolers weren't large enough to hold the meat. I was speculating, correctly as it turned out, that even with the two 250 quart coolers we lacked sufficient space for a full beef.

While we were there, Kristin asked if they did pork. They did and had the capability to smoke the hams and bacon. We had three hogs that were at or slightly above market weight. After a bit of discussion, we decided to get six smoked Country hams, six smoked Country picnics, six slabs of smoked bacon and two smoked pork loins, thinly sliced. Thinly sliced smoked pork loin is called 'Canadian Bacon' in the US but not in Canada. They would pick up the three hogs later that day and start the process with the killing and skinning. We could pick up the meat in four days and the smoked goods in two weeks. They used a wet brine process and hickory to hot smoke everything once the brining was done.

We went back and got another 250 quart cooler. You know how I think they must price cooler? A buck a quart. We could haul 950 quarts of frozen goods if we had to bug out. All three of the freezers, from the oldest used one I bought to the newest came from Sears, originally, and held 25ft³. About all that was left to do was something I hated, butchering chickens. I had two nails driven in stump where I could catch their heads. Once caught, one swing with a Cold Steel machete and they went to flopping around. That was the easy part.

The hard part was scalding the chickens and then plucking them. It was especially hard because we used three wash tubs. One was always boiling hot, a second heating and a third emptied, washed out, refilled with water and heating. Kristin insisted changing tubs every twelve chickens. There was only one way to keep hot water available continuously and that was to fill the third tub with water from our hot water heater. It probably lost 10° on its journey in the hose from the drain faucet on the hot water heater but that beat starting out with cold water. We had a trench just wide enough to build a fire in and support the weight of the wash tubs.

I was chopping heads and dipping the chickens and handing them to her. She would start the plucking process and when we had to wait for the hottest tub to finish heating I lent a hand. After that, they had to be singed to rid them of pin feathers and were dumped in a bath of ice water until we were ready to stop. We then gutted the birds, saving the heart, liver and crop which would become the gizzard. Depending on how many we processed on any given day, we'd cut them up and vacuum pack them or vacuum pack them whole.

We had a very large flock this year and it included 18 hens that weren't laying much and needed to be turned into baking chickens. That was on top of 118 fryers. We did fifty chickens the first day, another fifty the second and the rest on the third day. The day after, we went to pick up the fresh frozen pork. While the freezers weren't quite full to capacity, there wasn't much room left. Between a full beef, three hogs, 136 chickens, the things from Maid Rite and from Costco we'd be lucky if some of the meat didn't freezer burn.

The meat packer wrapped the meat in plastic and the plastic package in Kraft paper, butcher paper lined with a layer of plastic. We, in turn, vacuumed packed the packages with our seal-a-meal, providing a third layer of protection and greatly reduced the possibility of the meat drying out. Additionally, all three freezers were manual defrost which also lessens freezer burn. Finally, every package was dated and rotated with the oldest being moved to the top quarterly. It was, by any stretch of the imagination, a lot of food for two people.

"What do you suppose number three will be?"

"So that's what's behind our suddenly preparing for the end of the world?"

"At least to an extent, yes, I'll admit that. And, since they're classifying what happened recently as World War Three, I think we'll probably end up naming the next one World War Four. The US and India will support Israel. That was discussed over North Korea sinking that South Korean ship and later that attempt to run the Gaza blockade. Do you believe the "Anti-Christ walks among us?"

"You sound like you believe it's the End of Times."

"Maybe it is."

"You've been watching the History channel again?"

"What? Oh, no I haven't. I have given a lot of thought to the state the world is in with food shortages, lousy weather, Iran now officially being a nuclear nation plus the others with weapons sharing arrangements. With our additional preparations, we can weather any storm, natural or manmade. At one time, our single greatest resource was ammunition. Now, we'll run out of ammunition before food."

"About that. Can you get the empty .50 caliber brass reloaded? I want to sort through the other rifle brass and pull out the boxer primed ammo for reloading. Does he do all of the calibers we have?"

"He has some kind of progressive loaders for regular ammo, both rifle and pistol. He said he does 12, 16, 20 and 28 gauge shotgun shells. Is the .45 Colt already separated?"

“That, the .45-70, .45acp and 9mmP.

“I’ll take the .50, .45 Colt, .45acp, .45-70 and the shotgun shells tomorrow. You sort out the boxer primed 7.62×51mm, and the boxer primed 5.56×45mm. We might as well load as much as we can.”

“After we have the ammo reloaded and pick up the remaining pork, will that do it?”

“Pretty much.”

“There’s more?”

“I can’t tell you what it is, but it seems like we usually overlook something. And...it just dawned on me two things that we didn’t add to our existing stock, tea and honey.”

“Start a list and after we have everything else done, we make a final pass. If we don’t get it then, we do without.”

“Do you have a pair of binoculars?”

“No, put it on the list.”

“We have four sets of ALICE gear, two set up for M1As and two for the Minis. We don’t have a suppressor for your Browning although I have one for mine. You want me to find a threaded barrel?”

“If we can, sure. I suppose getting a silencer is out of the question?”

“Do you want one for your Browning?”

“Yes and I’d like one for my Para too.”

“No sweat, I have two.”

“Hard to get?”

“Money talks.”

I got both cash and gold out of the safe and headed out to this guy I knew. How he managed to get suppressors escaped me. He was out in the country and I’d never once seen any sign he was under surveillance by the BATFE or state or local law enforcement. If he didn’t have it, he could get it.

“What now?”

“Threaded barrel for a Browning Hi-Power classic. Suppressor for the same. If you have a threaded barrel and suppressor for a Para P-14, I’ll take that too.”

“Two ounces of gold. American Eagles, no foreign stuff.”

“A piece?”

“Total.”

I laid two one ounce Eagles on his table and he left to retrieve the merchandise. He was back in a minute with two boxes.

“The barrels are in the boxes with suppressors. How’s that Jet suppressor working out?”

“It works great. For what it cost me, it should.”

“The Elite Iron would have worked too; it’s just that it’s so much heavier.”

“Are you a prepper too?”

“Me? Hell no, I’m a ‘died in the wool’ Survivalist. There are a few of us in the area and we keep an extremely low profile. I worked for the ATF for a few years. It gave me a really bad taste in my mouth. Last assignment was Des Moines. I know the guys in the office and they never give me a second thought. Even if they did, they could get search warrants and search until the 22nd century and never find my inventory. And don’t think I don’t check out potential customers because I go through a very thorough background check. You already had a bunch of suppressors here in Iowa that you bought when you lived in Florida. Not to mention an AC-556. I even know the stamp numbers.”

“Got tired of being a jack booted thug?”

“Got tired of being called a jack booted thug. The NFA is unconstitutional regardless of the holding in Miller. Ninety nine point forty four percent of the gun laws in the US are unconstitutional.”

“I gotta go.”

“I’ll be here when you need something else.”

“How much for a Thompson submachine gun?”

“Twenty grand. It’s the military model M1A1 and uses the 30 round sticks. Kinda beat up but works just fine. Price includes a dozen sticks. You interested?”

“Not for twenty grand, no. They cost a couple of hundred new.”

“It comes with a tax stamp. Of course the National Firearms Registry has no record of that stamp number. Perfect counterfeit. The only problem is that this is Iowa and we’re civilized.”

“I know what you mean, believe me.”

“Did you get the barrels and silencers?”

“Two ounces of gold total. He has a Thompson complete with counterfeit tax stamp.”

“How much?”

“Twenty grand.”

“You want it?”

“Not at that price, no. Before the war, the government was paying \$209 for a M1A1 and by the end of the war, \$45 for a complete package including accessories and spare parts.”

“We have the gold.”

“I know. I had enough with me to buy it. I couldn’t bring myself to spend the money.”

“But, it would round out your ‘Out of the Ashes’ collection.”

“Do you want me to buy it?”

“I wouldn’t object. I’ll pay half, if you want.”

“No, I’ll pay the full cost. I’ll be back.”

“Wife talked you into it?”

“How did you know?”

“Didn’t. Just a guess. How are you fixed on .45acp?”

“With this, not as well as I’d like to be.”

“I have 230gr FMJ brass based Federal American Eagle.”

“How much?”

One Tin Soldier – Chapter 18

“Four hundred per case of 1,000 rounds. An ounce will get you five cases and I’ll throw in the rest of the 30 round sticks I have.”

“Eleven ounces total?”

“Yep.”

“Do you have ten cases?”

“Yep.”

“I’ll take ten and count out 12 ounces while you get the stuff.”

I laid out twelve Eagles in a row to make it easy for him to count. He came back with a 4 wheel caddy loaded with ten cases of ammo and the Thompson in a box. He showed me the contents of the box and it was just as he said. The metal was fine but the stock showed use. All sixteen magazines were in vinyl wrappers, apparently new or repackaged. He swept the gold into a pile and slipped it into his front pants pocket.

“I’ll help you load it.”

“Thanks.”

“Well?”

“Feel free to call me Ben Raines.”

“Jason will do just fine. Got it all out of your system now?”

“I do. What about you?”

“I picked up the reloaded ammo today. We’re pretty well set on Match grade ammo.”

“Good. How are we on medical supplies?”

“Like what?”

“Blood stoppers, blood bulkers, antibiotics and whatever we’d need if one of us gets shot again; although getting shot again is at the bottom of my list of favorite things to do.”

“We have a full supply of QuikClot ACS+ sponges. Our IV’s are out of date. So are the antibiotics. I’m not sure about the morphine. Most of the rest of the stuff is over the counter and current.”

“Will your doctor give you refills?”

“As long as I take in the out of date stuff. I’ll have to explain the normal saline, Ringer’s and morphine I used when you got shot. Not a problem, I’m sure he heard about us taking on those Chinese. He’s a prepper, you know.”

“Is that why he prescribed the stuff?”

“Yes. Although he gave me extensive written guidelines on the antibiotics, they were intended to be used by any available physician.”

“It was mostly a review for me. I had a chance to train and earn an Enlisted Medic badge. That’s the Air Force equivalent to a Combat Lifesaver.”

“I wondered about that at the time. You had no problem with the training at all. I thought it was just a natural talent.”

“I’m afraid not. I had a hard time learning to establish an IV.”

“You seemed to have that down pat.”

“Sometimes things that you have trouble learning really stick with you.”

“Those Reserve Deputies Badges were what allowed us to get the ‘TraumaPak w/ QuikClot, Emergency Bandage and high volume gauze’.”

“Maybe they’ll keep me out of jail over the NFA items.”

“It would be best to keep a low profile with those, just in case.”

She wasn’t gone that long considering she had to see the doctor and stop at a medical supply. Although some of the supplies she took back were ‘out-of-date’ the doctor said to keep them and use them. He wrote her prescriptions for everything she took in even though she kept some of the stuff. She paid cash and stopped by the bank and cleaned out the money in both of our checking accounts to put in the safe restoring our cash reserves. She had also stopped and picked up a case of honey and several cases of tea including Earl Grey, Darjeeling, Jasmine, English Breakfast, English Teatime, Constant Comment and Chamomile. She made one other stop and picked four cases of the 85 serving containers of Nestle Nesquik and two fifty pound bags of yellow popcorn.

“They called and the smoked pork is ready for pickup.”

“Help me unload the pickup and we’ll go get it.”

“It can wait a day.”

“No, it can’t. I’ve almost been holding my breath for the entire two weeks. Don’t ask why, because I simply can’t explain.”

We moved everything from the pickup into the storage building, temporarily. She was sitting in the Ford with the engine running when I came out from carrying in the last load.

“You carrying?”

“Don’t I always?”

“Ok.”

Off we went at a somewhat accelerated pace. The smoked meat went into the coolers which contained ice jugs and return trip was even faster than the trip there. A mile from home, the NOAA NWS SAME radio came up with a message to standby for the President. She drove through Cambridge like it wasn’t even there.

“You get the meat to the storage room. That freezer has the most room. I’ll grab the suitcases and empty the refrigerator. I’ll get my Oregon Scientific portable and you get yours.”

My fellow Americans,

Our satellites have revealed the launch of missiles from Russia. Take cover immediately. I repeat, take cover immediately.

That was probably the shortest Presidential address in history. I helped empty the refrigerator and made sure that the livestock was all in the barn. I started to stack the bales of hay and straw in front of the doors. Kristin joined me and moved the plastic in place after I finished the back door and moved to the front. It took only a few minutes for that task and we hurried to get into the shelter, via the storage room where we put the three 2x12 cross bars on both doors. We went to the basement and entered the tunnel to the shelter. Passing through the armory, I checked to see that all of the guns and ammo were there and properly stored. We could fight this war and the one that followed if we lived that long. But wait, this was number three. If there’s a number four, I think I’ll just lie down and die. Or, was it? Yellowstone didn’t blow.

Once we were settled in the shelter, I stopped and went over the announcement in my mind. *Our satellites have revealed the launch of missiles from Russia.* What was missing was where the missiles were targeted. Even under a launch on warning scenario, we wouldn’t retaliate until the targets were determined.

“Correct me if I’m wrong. The President said quote *our satellites have revealed the launch of missiles from Russia* unquote. Is that right?”

“That’s what he said. Why?”

“Where are they targeted?”

“The US obviously.”

“He didn’t say that. One could assume the US because he said quote *take cover immediately* unquote. You know what happens when a person assumes, right?”

“Makes a bass out of u and me, right?”

“Yeah, without the b. Let me hook up the CD V-717 and the AMP-200 and we’ll wait and see. There’s an interesting article on Wiki discussing launch on warning. Because we have those Ohio class subs deployed, there is absolutely no reason to launch on warning. Even if only half of them are deployed, that’s 1,344 warheads. I suppose it’s better for us to jump the gun than ignore his take cover instruction, but still...”

“Let’s wait for a while.”

“Did you get binoculars?”

“Oh I forgot.”

“Maybe we can get some later.”

“I didn’t forget to buy binoculars; I forgot to bring them to the shelter. They’re in the storage building with the tea, cocoa, honey and other things. It’s a brown paper sack.”

“You know how TOM usually manages to get a Global Thermonuclear War In his stories? Well, if this is really a war and not a false warning, I hope they’ll be ok out there in California.”

“I’m sure they will be. Was he a gun nut when you knew him?”

“He was, why?”

“Something he wrote once listed all of the guns he owned at one time before he began to sell them off. He had 23 firearms.”

“What did he have?”

“Let’s see if I can remember. He had:

1. AR-7 .22LR
2. Winchester 9422 XTR .22LR
3. Winchester 9422 XTR .22WRM
4. Winchester 94 XTR .30-30
5. Winchester 94 XTR .375 Winchester
6. Winchester 70 .30-06 iron sights
7. Marlin 1894C .357 Magnum
8. Marlin 1894 .44 Magnum
9. Ruger Mini-14 Stainless .223
10. Ruger Mini-14 Blued .223
11. Ruger Bearcat original .22LR
12. Ruger Single Six convertible .22LR/.22WRM
13. Ruger Blackhawk convertible 9mm/.357 Magnum
14. Ruger Super Blackhawk .44 Magnum
15. Browning Hi-Power 9mm
16. Colt Python 2½" Barrel .357 Magnum
17. Colt Python 4" Barrel .357 Magnum
18. Colt Detective Special .38 Special
19. S&W 36 blued .38 Special
20. Remington 870 20 gauge hunting barrel
21. Remington 870 12 gauge hunting barrel
22. Remington 870 blued riot gun
23. Remington 870 blued riot gun

"I could be wrong on the Detective Special and the S&W 36. I know he owned both, but I can't remember if he had them both at the same time. It was either both or he had a pair of 36s, one blue and one nickel. What is an S & W model 36?"

"J frame. Their smallest .38 Special. They brought it out around 1950 and initially called it the Chief's Special. When they went to the numbering system it became the model 36. It has a barrel 1⅞" long and holds five shots. It was discontinued and brought back around 2010 or so. I shot one once. It was an air weight that went about 15 ounces empty and really a handful. I'll bet he regrets selling those Pythons. Do you have any idea what a pristine Python is worth these days?"

"Uh-un."

"Three grand."

"WHO is still broadcasting."

"Are they saying anything about the EAS warning?"

"Uh...yes, it was a false alarm. Russia launched missiles but not at the US."

"Who then?"

“They didn’t say. What do we care so long as it wasn’t us?”

“What if it were an ally? Britain got sucked into WW II when Germany invaded Poland. I haven’t made up my mind about the Anti-Christ yet, so don’t ask.”

“Does this maybe count as a half?”

“A half of what?”

“A half of a disaster.”

“I think you either have a disaster or you don’t. You can’t have half of a disaster. A happening, if it’s a disaster, becomes smaller and smaller until it’s no longer a disaster. Example. Katrina was a total disaster, even without Brownie. Rita was a minor disaster but still a disaster. But Rita was a more powerful storm than Katrina. It makes a difference where a Hurricane hits land.”

“So, can we put the food back in the refrigerator in the kitchen and return to the bungalow?”

“Help me move the straw and hay and I help you move everything else.”

“Good. When we’re done, I want you to put a box or two of each flavor of tea in the shelter and the same in the pantry. Better do the cocoa too. Then, we’ll go find that bar you wanted for the living room and try to find the glassware.”

“I didn’t mention that, did I?”

“Mention? No. Muttered about it under your breath, several times. Thirty six inches wide you said.”

“It’s not good to mutter. It’s something I almost never do, as a practice in the field so as not give away my location.”

“I’m hungry.”

“You should have said something when we were near the Maid Rite.”

“I’m more in mood for a pizza.”

“Is the beer cold?”

“Yep. What flavor tonight?”

“The four meat pizza.”

“I’m going to shower and will take over for you. I won’t be long.”

It took the oven a while to pre-heat and I had just put the pizza in the oven when she came out of the bathroom wearing a robe and using a towel to dry her hair. I laid out the clothing I needed and had a medium length hot shower, shaved and brushed the fangs. She was just taking the pizza out of the oven. I got the pizza cutter and she pulled out something we decided to take a chance on, Miller’s Genuine Draft. Heavier than Coors but not bad.

The next day, we found a Steamer Trunk Indoor Home Bar that folded to 30” wide and expanded to 60” wide when pulled away from the wall. It was the least expensive of all the bars we looked at, running \$419 plus tax. We checked with a nearby bar, got the suppliers address and drove over there to pick up the barware. The furniture was ‘average’ the barware was standard commercial barware. The contents were anything but average or standard.

Once we had it set up and stocked, Kristin handed me an old book, *The Old Mr. Boston Official Bartender’s Guide*. It would have been nice to have a small keg refrigerator with a carbon dioxide set up. No more than we drank, a half keg would go bad before we were more than halfway through it.

“Dad gave me that. He said it dated to the mid-1960s. I just wish that Single Barrel wasn’t so expensive, I actually enjoy it neat or on the rocks. What are those small glasses we got?”

“The short three ounce shooter glasses? As a kid, I watched a lot of westerns. You see someone go into a bar and order a shot. The bartender would set a glass on the bar and fill it about ⅓ full. I’m not sure how they did that pouring from a bottle. But those pourers we bought will pour one ounce at a time. The other style I bought pour at a fixed rate and you can learn to count to one ounce. I think the ones we bought are slow pour so you’d count to six for a one ounce shot. We didn’t buy many because unlike a bar, we’d lose too much to evaporation. Once we can eyeball an ounce, we won’t use them anymore. That’s why I bought the cheap plastic kind rather than the nice stainless kind. I did get two stainless dual jiggers with half ounce on one side and one ounce on the other.”

“I’d say we’re set in the bar business.”

“You floored me when you came up with that list of liquor you wanted. We haven’t finished some of that first bunch we bought way back when we were doing the greenhouse.”

“I don’t know what to say, Jason. I can tell you it’s related to this gut feeling I have. How it’s related is beyond me. For a bit there when the announcement came over the NWS radio, I thought, *This is it*. I was obviously wrong. Maybe it’s just what some of the folks

on Frugal's say that I'm combining in my mind and drawing some conclusion. Just you wait, one of these days TOM will say lock and load and won't be joking."

"He's said that several times and nothing came of it. He always did seem to overreact to things. Like that Cuban Missile Crisis. He was the only one in the barracks to do their laundry and load their duffel bag.

An inside look at what was happening:

About the only volcano that hadn't erupted during the volcanic period was Cumbre Vieja on La Palma. It didn't erupt this time either. And had that been the only event that occurred, it wouldn't really effected Cambridge, Iowa. A 'missing Russian nuke' of relatively low yield was planted in the crack of the volcano during the volcanic period. For whatever reason, it wasn't set off and remained in position until members of the same terrorist group managed to locate it. They were waiting for the perfect moment to make their statement July 4th, Independence Day.

The second part of their plan was similar to a plan that Grand58742 had used in *Normal*. In his story, the US attacked Iran after it was 'proven' that Iran had used six stolen Soviet nukes on the US. The US attacked Iran after protracted diplomatic discussions. Similar because the same terrorists had six Russian nukes purchased from a Russian General for ten million Euros each. They had been placed in major Iranian cities and would be detonated after the weapon on La Palma.

The third and final part of the plan involved getting India and Pakistan into an all-out exchange of nuclear weapons with Pakistan launching the first strike and India retaliating. A small portion of the Pakistani missiles would be intentionally rerouted to southern China, bringing one of the Big Five into the melee. China was still licking its wounds from the failed 'Invasion USA'. They used their remaining missiles with the range to shower both Pakistan and India.

The thought was that China would fire a few towards Russia or the US and initiate a GTW. China couldn't spare the missiles and didn't attack either of us. And you remember our mad dash to the shelter over Russia launching missiles? Test flights with dummy warheads that splashed down in the southern Indian Ocean. It was just another of several situations that had arisen during the Cold War that Wiki lists in detail.

With the various attacks occurring July 4th, North Korea used both their nuclear warheads on short to medium range missiles and nuked Seoul and Pusan. The following day, their troops began to pour across the DMZ. The actions of the North Koreans weren't part of the terrorists planning. But it worked well because US Carrier Strike Groups were in the area conducting training maneuvers with the South Korean Navy. The nukes aboard the carriers are B-61 7/11s and they're delivered by F/A-18 Super Hornets. They fall into the class of weapons known as tactical nukes. The treaties deal with strategic nukes.

The US chopped the head off the snake and was bringing the troops from Okinawa. An amphibious ship was included in the exercise and carried a full complement of US Marines. Where is it written that GTWs are all out weapons exchanges with perhaps a second or third wave? Before the days of ICBMs, a GTW was a prolonged affair using bombers carrying small quantities of very heavy nuclear bombs. Had countries not been able to reduce the size of the weapons, ICBMs might not have ever been used.

Two major powers, China and the US were now involved as indicated. Russia had her systems on 2 minute alert as did the US with its primary systems, the Minuteman IIIs and Ohio class SSBNs. The UKs nuclear weapons are Trident SLBMs and France has a mix of SLBMs and land based warheads and bombs. Public information, all you have to do is look. You'll get the numbers, not where they're located unless you visit the correct websites.

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The explosion of the nuke on La Palma had the desired effect. That portion of the island that was sheared slid into the Atlantic and created a huge tsunami. Sixteen hundred feet high near the island, the height fell as it traveled in an expanding circle. When it reached our Continental Shelf, the height grew again and it was over 200 meters high when it hit our eastern seaboard. The distance the water traveled inland was primarily controlled by the terrain. Low lying Florida and the Keys were washed smooth of structures. There hadn't been sufficient time to evacuate the state or the islands and millions died there and along the east coast.

To the north, Long Island with a peak elevation of 122 meters had some of its seven million plus inhabitants survive. Manhattan Island had water in the streets and up several floors of high rise buildings. It wasn't that there was no warning, there was. Nuclear detonations leave a seismic signature. Geologists around the world knew in minutes of the location, La Palma. One of the few international flights in the area reported the mushroom cloud at the far reaches of their visual range. A satellite also picked up the nuclear detonation. Another satellite got a picture showing part of Cumbre Vieja missing.

The word went out, worldwide. It was especially important to countries with Atlantic coastlines, South, Central and North America. Caribbean Islands. Other islands of the north Atlantic and eastern Atlantic. European coast lines. To an extent, the Med and most definitely Africa. Some would have minutes to deal with the crisis, others scant hours. The lessons of hurricane Rita and the evacuation came back to haunt the US.

In addition, some of the other things happening were reported by various news sources. They reported North Korea nuking South Korea and the US response with tactical nuclear weapons. They further reported that both the US and Russia were at the highest state of alert they had. While aircraft weren't grounded, international flights fell sharply.

A portion of domestic flights were cancelled. Temporary restrictions were placed on air travel to limit it to business related travel only. Additional Amtrak trains were put into service along with additional long haul buses to handle the non-business travel needs. The nuclear war between India and Pakistan that also involved China was reported.

Despite the scope of the tragedy the terrorists had caused, we were as snug as bug in a rug in Cambridge and didn't even need the shelter. On the east coast, Delaware was mostly under the Atlantic and Chesapeake. Washington being just inland from the Chesapeake and on the Potomac River had more than its share of water. It reached up the steps of the Capitol Building. Per SOP, the Supreme Court Justices, the members of Congress and the Executive Branch were evacuated. Both VC-25s and several commercial aircraft stranded at Reagan and Dulles were commandeered to fly out members of Congress. The Supreme Court Justices and various members of Cabinet Agencies joined them along with the Vice President. The President and most of his Cabinet officers were actually aboard 'Air Force One', tail number 29000.

The President and his Cabinet went to Offutt AFB, Omaha. The VP went to St. Louis with the Cabinet subordinates and the Supreme Court. Congress was delivered to Peterson AFB and bused from there to Cheyenne Mountain AFB. The Cabinet subordinates complained about an inability to contact their Secretaries. Congress was just plain unhappy.

After we heard the news reports on WHO about the government being evacuated and the grumbling of Congress, Kristin remarked we should have just let them drown, no doubt a popular sentiment. Which brings to mind the phrase, 'consent of the governed'. Let's talk about that. 'Consent of the governed' is a phrase synonymous with a political theory wherein a government's legitimacy and moral right to use state power is only justified and legal when derived from the people or society over which that power is exercised. This theory of "consent" is historically contrasted to the divine right of kings and has often been invoked against the legitimacy of colonialism. A key question is whether the unanimous consent of the governed is required; if so, this would imply the right of succession for those who do not want to be governed by a particular collective. Somewhere, at some time since 1775 and now, the government formed in 1787 lost track of that portion of the Declaration of Independence.

"I guess you were right, things are popping up all over."

"Yeah, huh? It's kind of a good news-bad news sort of thing. The good news is, of course, that all the things that happened haven't directly affected us. The bad news is that my gut is in an even tighter knot. Whatever is eating at me wasn't this."

"Ok what do you want to do?"

One Tin Soldier – Chapter 19

“Seriously? It’s going to sound silly, but here goes. We have almost nothing to use in a bug out situation. We have enough coolers for 950 quarts of frozen food. We don’t have a propane camping stove, lanterns or a heavy grill for the top to a fire pit. Cast iron cookware is heavy but very durable. We don’t have a tent, good or otherwise. We don’t have any propane bottles; I’d favor five 100 pound bottles. Briefly stated we need a complete set of camping gear and some Mountain House two serving freeze dried foods.”

“I don’t understand. Why would we need to bug out?”

“I don’t know that we would need to bug out. At the moment, we couldn’t if the need arose. We obviously couldn’t take everything we have. Both of our vehicles have trailer hitches although we only have one trailer. A non-vehicle bug out could be accomplished on horseback. We have enough horses and tack to do that. Jason, we have to do this systematically. Decide what we want to take and acquire what we don’t already have.”

“You just like shopping. Admit it Kristin.”

“Most women like to shop. It’s not about that. Are you going to give me trouble over this?”

“I may be slow. I’m not stupid. Do you know what you want?”

“Mostly. I have the needed items grouped to allow for substitutions. It’s like I know more what we don’t need to buy than what we do need to buy. We sure don’t need any fire-arms or ammo. We can go through the cases we got from Walton’s and pick out the number ten cans. We can compare what we have with what’s available and add anything we’re missing. For example, how many boxes of strike anywhere matches do we have?”

“I usually just buy a three pack. About one and a half boxes. About the only time I use one is to light the grill or on an occasion a cigarette.”

“Right. We should buy a full case; they don’t go bad with a little proper care. It was only an example Jason.”

“Wait a minute. We have 8 horses and only four sawbucks. All the horses are trained to pack, to be ridden and to harness. We either need something that a pair of horses can pull or more sawbucks.”

“I planned on making a trip to Perry where we got the saddles. However, my brothers have a wagon with a tongue so it can be pulled by horses. I want to keep our options open. We can probably haul more with a wagon.”

“What kind of wagon?”

“Just your everyday modern pneumatic tire wagon with a wooden tongue and a box bed with 24” aluminum sides. They added a full width seat mounted on springs. It’s not actually very heavy. They also made hoops that fit into slots on the sides and a lightweight canvas cover. It’s about as close to a Conestoga wagon that you can get.”

“How much distance could we cover in a day?”

“Oh, forty miles top. That would be pushing the horses and I rather shoot for an average of twenty-five miles per day. Figure one hundred fifty miles per week. Have to take a day off to rest the horses and ourselves. Plan on some horse feed to supplement the grazing. I’m assuming a walking pace of four miles per hour for the horses. Our Standardbreds are as good as they come for multiple use horses.”

The wagon had the regular tongue on it with the horse tongue, hoops and canvas packed in the bed and held down with bungee cords. From Adel, we went to Perry and picked up a pair of saw bucks and replacement harnesses. The ones we had were in pretty sad shape. We also picked up two scabbards for scoped rifles. Kristin said she wanted them mounted on the wagon for our Super Match rifles.

Back in Des Moines, we went to several stores before we had the #10 cans of the Mountain House products she wanted. No one had a full case of strike anywhere matches so we had to buy them by the three packs from hardware stores. A full case was 16 three packs. There were six Ace Hardware stores in the greater Des Moines area plus one in Perry, one in Nevada and one in Boone.

We got five of the 100 pound propane bottles and hoses. We added a pair of propane PowerPack Coleman stoves and a quad lantern. We added a full set of the Coleman cast iron products, an oven and a toaster. Dinnerware was two sets of enamelware and two sets of stainless steel enamel flatware plus assorted utensils. Rather than separate screened room and tent, we selected the Elite Weathermaster 6 screened tent which even included a battery operated 15 watt spiral fluorescent tube.

We did not go with Coleman for our sleeping gear. We selected Therm-a-rest Base Camp inflating mattress pads to support Mountain Hardware Ultralamina Sleeping Bags. However, we did select a Coleman PackAway folding table with benches that sat four plus a thirty inch square compact folding table for the stoves. Having a single trailer wouldn’t do and we bought a re-painted U-Haul 6x12 enclosed trailer. She could pull the old, smaller, trailer with her Comet.

The Coleman stoves would work with a hose adapter or a one pound canister. We avoided the canisters because of the 25 gallon tanks, hoses and adapters. The shopping took three days. It took us a week to get everything sorted and organized and two days to carefully pack it in the trailers. We combat loaded the trailers with sixty percent in the larger trailer and forty percent in the smaller. All of the goods could be carried with

the horse drawn wagon using five pack horses and one rider or six pack horses if we both rode the wagon. Kristin suggested she should be the rider and I drive the team if we had to bug out on horseback. The subject of bugging out on horseback wasn't any more unusual than bugging out using kayaks. We couldn't do that here because of the possible dams on the Skunk River. The process of bugging out by kayak had been thoroughly discussed in *Kayak Bug Out*.

Tom and Jerry had different approaches to their tall tales. TOM spent most of his story getting ready for the disaster(s) while Jerry spent most of his time dealing with what happened. To get a complete picture for any given event, it was better to find a story each had written concerning a particular subject and sort of roll them up into a combined package. For want of a name, call it 'One Tin Soldier'. I kid you not.

"Do you want to do a trial run?"

"It's not a bad idea. That said; it lacks the spontaneity of an actual event."

"I can fix that. We'll get Deputy Dog to stop by some night when he's out on patrol and call the alert."

"I don't call him that anymore. You really shouldn't either. It's not his fault."

"Just to make it more interesting, I set it up through Melody and neither of us will have a clue when he's going to pull it off."

"It's going to be tough getting those propane cylinders on the top of the sawbucks. Ok if I load them in the wagon instead?"

"Whatever trips your trigger works for me."

"Speaking about tripping my trigger, I think I'll get a shower."

"I guess I'd better join you."

Kristin called Melody the next day and explained what we wanted. She carefully explained that we could bug out by vehicles or horseback and it was up to David to make the decision of what was appropriate and why. It was to be unannounced and the choice of time, day or night was up to David. I went through our preps top to bottom, practicing moving the supplies from the trailers to the wagon and packhorses and then back to the trailers. I got it down to a matter of four hours by myself. Kristin helped the next time and cut the time in half. We selected several locations, starting with Ledges State Park south of Boone. Using a protractor, lines went in 12 different directions roughly 30° apart.

While we waited, a few minor adjustments to our equipment were made. Elastic butt-stock shell holders, sidesaddles and shell holding slings were added to the shotguns.

Additional 20 round CMI magazines were acquired and loaded. Four double pistol magazine pouches and magazines were purchased for the pistol belts. The plastic one quart canteens were replaced with stainless single wall canteens and the canteen cups replaced with stainless cups. Canteen stoves were added to the second canteen pouch and four two-quart and four four-quart Oasis canteens were picked up along with a supply of Micropur tablets and Katadyn Combi water filters with one spare ceramic element and several packages of activated carbon for the 2nd stage filter.

While you might be thinking we were overloading the horses, we weren't. Each could easily carry up to 300 pound loads. The heavier items would go in the wagon. Breast-plates and cruppers would keep the packs from sliding backward or forward. Cargo carried on the packhorses was packed in duffels easing the transition from the trailers to the horses. It was planned, checked, changed as needed and rechecked.

We decided to go with a single 250 quart cooler if we used horses and a pair of the 250 quart coolers if we pulled trailers. From start to finish, it took three weeks to complete our preparations. Four days later a police siren went off at our front gate. I dressed quickly added my Glocks to the ankle and paddle holsters and went out to say good morning to David. It wasn't David at the gate. It was another Deputy who announced that an evacuation had been ordered by the Governor. He added that I-35 was blocked for several miles. The reason for the evacuation was a train wreck of a train hauling several highly hazardous chemicals. We quickly decided to use the horses and wagon and take county roads for the entire trip to the park. We were loaded and ready to go in an hour.

"Set?"

"Let's go."

Kristin led the way being more familiar with this part of Iowa. We followed back roads and eventually enter Ledges State Park from the east side. We strung a rope corral and had all eight horses on halters tied to the rope with a lead to allow them to graze. We proceeded to set up the tent, spread out our sleeping gear and added the cooking gear to the screened porch. The ten 5-gallon water bottles in the wagon would cover our water needs for several days. I set up the porta potty inside the privacy enclosure and hung a five gallon sun shower bag above the center of the shower enclosure. A second bag was hung to warm for a second shower. I added the bag to the porta potty and our sanitation needs were covered. I doubted the shower bags would fully heat because of the lateness of the day and left room for a gallon of water heated on the stove. We took the horses to the Des Moines River two at a time and let them drink their fill.

"I'll start a pot of coffee. Do you want to pick the entrée and side dish for supper?"

"How about that Chili Mac with beef and sliced strawberries for desert?"

"How much?"

“I’m hungry. I’ll have a double serving of the entrée and a single serving of strawberries.”

“May I ask what you two think you’re doing?”

“Camping out. The Governor ordered an evacuation of the greater Des Moines area due to a train wreck involving hazardous chemicals.”

“You don’t say. Let me check.”

“You don’t suppose David got another Deputy to initiate the test run?”

“Sorry folks, you’ve been misinformed. There is no train wreck in Des Moines involving chemicals or anything else.”

“That’s good to hear. I believe I know what happened. A friend of ours, who is a Story County Deputy Sheriff, was asked to give us an alert to bug out to test our preparations. You can check; his name is David Lawson.”

“I’ll check it out.

“It checks out alright. I spoke to Lawson. He said he had another Deputy give you the warning to evacuate so you wouldn’t suspect it was the planned drill. He went on to say that you are both Reserve Deputies as part of the Sheriff’s Search and Rescue Unit. I must say that strikes me as odd, considering your ages. I don’t suppose you have ID and your badges with you?”

“You mean our American Express Cards? We never leave home without them. Here is mine.”

“And here’s mine officer. You didn’t say what agency you’re connected with.”

“Boone County Deputy Sheriff. I’m not on duty. When I saw you two with your horses and wagon, I figured I’d better check you out. Considering the hour, you can stay the night. Try to be on the road by nine am.”

“It will be earlier than that, you can be sure. Get you anything? Coffee, iced tea or a beer?”

“No thanks, I’d better get going. The scuttlebutt is that Lawson has gotten into preparedness in a big way.”

“He has; probably because of us. I’ve been at it forever and the two of us for over twenty years.”

We spent the night, got up at 5:30, had breakfast and packed up. We were home late that afternoon. David was waiting for us.

“Sorry about that. The warning was true. The Department of Energy has classified the incident as a national security issue. Do you know what a BLEVE is?”

“A BLEVE is a boiling liquid expanding vapor explosion. So the warning was true?”

“What warning? Look, the train was transporting some spent reactor fuel rods from Duane Arnold to a storage site in Texas. The initial fear was that if a BLEVE occurred, we might end up with a so called dirty bomb. If you’ve seen the special containers they’re going to use to transport those rods on TV, you know that even a BLEVE couldn’t cause a release of radiation. The issue is sensitive and could cause a wide-spread panic. The Governor issued the order and later withdrew it when the fire was extinguished. It was several miles east of Des Moines and could have caused a major panic. By focusing on a potential BLEVE, the Governor diverted attention from the real problem.”

“No harm, no foul. Our system checked out perfectly. Next time, we’ll try it with vehicles rather than horses.”

“But the horse thing worked?”

“Without a hitch, no pun intended. At least your explanation covers one thing that concerned me.”

“What was that?”

“The other Deputy said I-35 was blocked. Yet when we crossed it wasn’t.”

“Actually it was, further south in Polk County. It was totally blocked from the Ankeny exit to the Elkhart exit. They had I-80 eastbound closed, leaving I-35 north and south open and I-80 west open. It was worse than rush hour. How did you make the trip and where did you go?”

“We used back roads from here to Ledges State Park. Got everything set up, watered the horses and got ready to spend the night. I referred the Deputy to you, end of story.”

“Where did you get that wagon?”

“My brothers built it David. The body will lift off and other bodies lift on. It has a standard pull tongue and that wooden horse tongue. There are hoops and a lightweight canvas cover. Since we have 8 horses, we picked up more sawbucks in Perry. What’s the deal with strike anywhere matches? They’re hard to find.”

“That’s like everything else, blame the feds. Say you order a three pack online. Maybe four bucks plus shipping. Add another twenty eight bucks for a hazardous material charge. The only place I know to get them anymore is Ace Hardware.”

“They’re out.”

“What? I just bought some.”

“Right, we bought the rest and cleaned out several stores. We didn’t go to Boone.”

“I understand preparing for disasters. What the two of you are doing smacks of hoarding.”

“If I recall correctly, Melody was awfully glad we did.”

“Oh, that’s where she...”

“Probably worth their weight in gold, in a manner of speaking, right?”

“She got something made out of cloth for her needs during those times.”

“I don’t have any of those. What I have is a pattern and two bolts of the appropriate cotton cloth. I also have a box full of the belts I picked up in the eighties when it appeared they’d stop making them. They did not longer after.”

“What’s your food supply up to?”

“More than ten years, average. Longer on some things we can’t grow. It’s the same way with manufactured goods. Kristin has this nagging feeling that something big is going to happen. Several times recently, we both thought, *this is it*. We were obvious wrong, the last major incident in the US was the tsunami and it didn’t affect us.”

“With all of the things you have collected, why would you even consider bugging out?”

“Options. A person has to have options. We can bug out by vehicle, using horses or on foot. The last choice is way down on my list. We’re well prepared here, too, and our first choice would be to stay.”

“Man, I hope to tell you. With the PV panels and the submarine batteries, you should have power forever. About the only thing I can see that you don’t have is a grain silo for the livestock. What’s in the barn loft, one year, two?”

“Probably between the two figures. Kristin’s brothers have that farm out near Adel. I suppose a silo is something to think about. We’d probably need to discuss it with Kristin’s brothers and get their input. There is also the matter of hay storage. The loft wouldn’t store enough for as long as we could store grain.”

“You do know they store alfalfa in silos don’t you Jason?”

“They do? That’s a new one on me.”

“We’ll definitely talk to my brothers.”

We talked to them alright. It was good we did. They had three Hanson concrete silos and wanted to replace them with larger Harvestore silos. At the moment, the silos were nearly empty and if we wanted them, we had to act fast. They’d already arranged financing for the new silos through their bank and we could pay for the old silos as we had the funds. Disassembly, moving and reassembly would all be on us. It was too good of a deal to pass up.

The barn was constructed just inside the second 2½ acre field. There was room for all three silos between the barn and either property line. Kristin’s brother found a contractor to handle the old silos, another turnkey deal. The guy erected silos for a living and there hadn’t been (m)any concrete silos sold in Iowa recently. He had the equipment and many of his employees were looking for work. He cut the brothers a very good deal. Kristin and I forked over some cash and a bit of gold to get the ball rolling.

“How are we going to get the corn and oats out of the barn loft?”

“It’s a turnkey deal. It includes conveying the grains to their individual silos, pelletizing the hay for the third silo and moving the straw to the loft. I think he must be hiring illegals or people willing to work for minimum wage based on the cost of the transfers.”

“So we’re going to have to pelletize all the hay we get from your brothers?”

“Not at all. They have the baler because of the straw. They bale hay especially for us. They use pelletized hay stored in one of the elevators. This will make it simpler for them and probably reduce what they charge us for hay. The only piece of equipment we’ll need to purchase is a large grain auger/screw conveyor. They may even sell us their old one since the new elevators they’re putting in are much taller and they’ll need a new one.”

“How do we power it?”

“It has a built in gasoline engine. We should probably have the engine looked over and rebuilt if necessary.”

“Do you have an answer for every question?”

“I won’t if you ask one I don’t know the answer to.”

“One of them mentioned about ten years back that they had to purchase a new auger because of the hay. They have a smaller diameter one they use for grain. If you want, we can install a system to auger the grain and hay to the barn. I wasn’t sure if we could afford to do that or if we even wanted to.”

“Good point; maybe we should wait and see. We’ll have to build up our funds after we get the silo installation paid for and the silos paid for. I can’t see me hauling grain and hay by wheelbarrow. How do we get the grain and hay out of the silo?”

“The lower section has an auger that transfers the contents to whatever you use to transport the hay or grain.”

“Are all brands the same?”

“I don’t know. They must have something, but what it is may vary by manufacturer. Did you see the Harrison Ford and Kelly McGillis movie, *Witness*?”

“Yes, why?”

“The Amish don’t use powered equipment and I think that scene with the silo showed a different arrangement. Ford suffocated that guy with corn.”

“That’s right, buried him, shot another one with the recovered shotgun.”

“Now I’ve seen how the concrete silos were set up initially but not the third silo that they used for hay. We’ll probably need some kind of cart to haul a few bushels at a time. It’s going to be a while before we can do the vehicle bug out drill. Do we really need to do it? There’s only one difference I can think of. With the horses and no wagon, we’re very mobile. With the horses and the wagon we can go the same place we can with the pickup, car and trailers.”

“I wasn’t thinking Kristin. I mean having the silos and all will be nice; BUT, we still have other expenses, like fuels and the extra hay and grain to fill the silos.”

“Does that mean we’re finally done prepping?”

“I don’t know if I’d go that far. We have to replace whatever we use.”

“Obviously. But, not more new preps?”

“I seem to recall that this last round was because of you having a funny feeling in your stomach.”

“It was. We never considered the possibility of needing to bug out. With that base covered, we’re down to getting replacements.”

“I never thought I’d live to see the day.”

“You’re not eighteen anymore either. Or, for that matter, the forty two you were when you retired from the Air Force or the sixty-five and a half when you totally retired.”

“I’m not so sure retired is the right word. It seems like I’ve worked as hard or harder since I retired.”

“You haven’t. Neither of us has the energy we once had. Which reminds me; we need to get out our artillery and make a trip to the range.”

“I think that Tac-50 has gained more weight. Even the Super Match rifles have picked up a couple of pounds.”

“Posh, they came that way. A standard weighs 9.3 pounds while a Super Match weighs 12.2 pounds. That’s with an empty magazine and no optics or a bipod.”

“How do you know?”

“Look at the screen. I have Springfield Armory’s website up.”

“It’s going to feel strange with no project to do. You did get heirloom, open pollinated seeds didn’t you?”

“Yes dear. I shopped around and bought the heirloom varieties that we would eat. I have sixty different kinds of seeds representing forty varieties of plants. Want a run down?”

“Maybe some of the stuff.”

“Potatoes in three varieties, Yukon Gold, Russet Burbank and Kennebec; Chioggia beets; cabbage: King Slaw and early red; Danvers and Touchon carrots; a collection of four heirloom tomato varieties, Black Krim, Burpee’s Supersteak, Brandywine plus Little Mama Roma; Romaine and Iceberg lettuce; Blue Lake and heavyweight II snap beans; California bell peppers, Anaheim and Poblano peppers; Acorn, Butternut and Spaghetti squash; Ruby seedless and Georgia rattlesnake watermelons; Hale’s Best Cantaloupe; Little Dillicious cucumbers; Onion Parade, a combo pack with white, red and yellow onions plus Walla Walla sweet onions; two types of sweet potatoes; Purple top turnips; garden and snow peas; Early Sweet Sugar Pie Pumpkin; and, Golden Bantam sweet corn. That should cover it unless I forgot something.”

“Radishes. How many seeds did you get?”

One Tin Soldier – Chapter 20

“A three year supply.”

“How do we stand on jars and lids?”

“We primarily need replacement rings for the plastic lids. Depending on the size of the garden, we may turn up short on jars so I checked and it’s the same deal, wholesale if I buy 144 cases of jars or more.”

“You arrange for the jars. If you need me I’ll be in the storage building rearranging things to make room for those jars. Can you order the rings by email?”

“Yes. However, I’d better get 1,800 of the lids and 5,400 of the rubber rings. I bought you a present when I was out and about. Give this a smell.”

“Cuban?”

“Yep. Got a full box so you can have a good smoke with the Courvoisier Napoleon Cognac you bought.”

“I haven’t even opened a bottle. I’ve wanted to try cognac since I was stationed at Edwards because one of the guys in the Missile Squadron only drank cognac. Apparently, you drink it neat in a brandy snifter and heat it with your hand to raise the aroma or bouquet.”

“Oh really? Maybe the cigars weren’t such a good idea. The smoke will ruin your taste buds and your sense of smell. Maybe you should choose either one or the other.”

“I’d better get busy on the storage building. Maybe if I’m lucky I can get done today.”

You have to understand about the jars. There are 12 jars in a case. A gross of cases of jars is 1,728 jars (1,440+288). I’m certain that we’ve bought 4 gross or almost 7,000 jars. We needed jars because we never seemed to get them back from Adel. We stored canned produce in the shipping cases the jars came and labeled each case according to its contents using computer labels and a felt tip pen. And, she wants to add another 1,700 jars? They don’t wear out that fast! On the other hand, it was Kristin’s money. Tattler said: “Wash plastic lids and rubber rings, rinse, dry and store for future use. Do not save any rubber ring which is cut or deformed. Tattler rubber rings can be reused if no damage is visible. We suggest they be turned over each use. Previous placement will be evident by seal ring grooves left by lid.” But, you had to be oh so careful and use a table knife to break the lid’s seal.

“We have to go to Adel before you order more jars. We bought 6,900 plus jars over the years and I want to get them back. Then, we’ll count and see how many we really need.”

“But...”

“But what? Your parents said they’d return the jars. Both of you sister-in-laws said the same thing. What are they doing with the jars?”

“Truthfully?”

“If you’re not going to tell the truth, don’t answer.”

“They’ve been selling their excess canned goods at the Adel Farmer’s Market.”

“Ok. They can just deduct \$5,000 from what we owe them for the silos and you can order more jars, rings and lids. Do you want to explain it to them or should I do it?”

“I think I’d better do it Jason. We have to be careful that we don’t cut off our nose to spite our face. I can start with mom and dad and see how well they take it.”

“Either way, there’s room in the storage building for the new jars. As much as I love your blackberry and strawberry preserves, could we put in a few grape vines?”

“I’ll call and order the jars. We can get Concord grape vines from a nursery in Ankeny. Do you want to take the trailer in case they return any jars?”

“No. I intend to insist the jars be offset against what we owe them.”

“Bob will probably accept that. You know what a hot head Jim is. Expect him to tell us to stick ‘em.”

“Jim can say anything he wants. Talk to Bob. We’ll still owe them a bundle for the silos and don’t want to alienate them so we can still get corn, oats and hay from them.”

Kristin placed the order for 1,800 new lids with rings and another 5,400 rings online. We stopped by her friends on the way and ordered the jars. Next, we stopped by her parents where we learned that they had been giving the empty jars to Bob and Jim. We confronted Bob together to see what he’s say.

“We don’t have the jars, sis. We’ve done a land office business on selling our extra garden crops. What do you figure the jars were worth?”

“Considering shipping they run a dollar per jar. We’ve done some calculating on our own and between the two of you and mom and dad, we’ve supplied you 5,000 jars in round numbers. Any suggestions?”

“We could knock \$5,000 off the price of the grain and hay you need or off what you owe us for the silos, your choice.”

“Jason?”

“With the silos we have now, we’re going to need a lot of grain and hay to fill them. When we came over, I was thinking about the second choice. I think your first suggestion might be the better choice. How much spare production do you expect to have?”

“After setting aside hay and grain for our livestock and selling some excess grain to recover our costs, it will take us two years to fill the hay silo and three years to fill the grain silos. Our agreement was for you to pay for the silos as you had funds to do so. You got a bargain on those, let me tell you. They would have cost you double if you bought used silos from Hanson. Plus I understand you got a deal on the disassembly, moving and erection. Do you both agree to apply the cost of the jars against your grain and hay purchases?”

“Kristin?”

“Ok.”

“Done.”

“Do you have enough of everything for moment?”

“We need hay soon and the oats not long after. The corn should see us through until mid-October.”

“We’re doing the second cutting of hay next week. You can have all of it. The oats will be six weeks or so and we’ll split them right down the middle. The corn should come out during late September or early October. We can let you have a third. The real problem is going to be Jim.”

“I warned Jason about the possibility.”

“That she did. I think we can cover the excess charge for the feeds without a problem and still make a reasonable payment against the silos. Once they’re full, we should be able to increase the silo payment.”

“I’m just curious; are you preparing for Armageddon? You’ve been at this since the two of you got together.”

“I began accumulating weapons and ammo since the early ‘60s. I suppose Armageddon is included in the list of possibilities. They start with lesser natural disasters and go all the way up to something like that volcanic period a few years back. On top of that they include man-made disasters, like the Gulf oil spill of 2010 and up to a GTW. We’ve been at it longer than you suggest. ”

“GTW?”

“Global Thermonuclear War.”

“The Chinese did launch that HEMP attack as a prequel to their invasion. India and Pakistan used up their nukes against each other and China. To top it off, there was that Russian multiple launch of missiles into the Indian Ocean. WMDs aren’t limited to nuclear weapons either. Biological and chemical attacks are included. I also would include radiological weapons like dirty bombs. Then there was that thing with La Palma and Iran.”

“You’re reliving the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Cold War. It’s not like that now.”

“Sure, if that’s what you think. You seem to have a large amount of home grown food. There are a few things you could add that wouldn’t bust your budget if you were interested.”

“Kristin?”

“I check it every day Bob.”

“I can’t see how it would help with something like that volcanic period we experienced.”

“It might not; not everything can be anticipated. The Forum has members from every state in the Union. They know what’s happening locally and occasionally give everyone a head’s up. You take something like the Cumbre Vieja volcano. Terrorist act, pure and simple. Pretty difficult to predict something like that because they don’t take out ads in the New York Times to advertise their plans.

“Chemical weapons are localized and while deadly, have a limited reach. Biological weapons only require a single infected carrier to fly to the US from a foreign location, say London for example. Almost everyone on the plane gets exposed to whatever the person is infected with and when they reach their final destinations, a lot more people are exposed. The hard fast rule I personally believe in is isolation. It could take months for something to die out. Kristin and I could go for three years, minimum, once we get those silos filled. That’s just the livestock feed; we have enough food for over ten years and the means to produce more.”

“So biological weapons are a poor man’s nuclear weapon?”

“If all the user does is collect and increase the supply of an existing virus or bacterium, that’s possible. There may or may not be a vaccine or treatment, depending upon what they use. The sophisticated weapons are expensive to produce because they’re engineered to have no available treatment. It all depends. The single carrier idea reflects several real life situations over the past twenty-five years.”

“We’ll talk it over. Are the silos up?”

“Yes. Our existing supplies of oats and corn have been transferred. We didn’t bother to chop the hay and will use up the bales. The straw is in the barn loft.”

“We’ll bring the pelletized hay over as soon as it’s harvested.”

“If you need a hand, I can drive your big truck.”

“It’s fed directly into the wagons. We only have three so we’ll have to split up the harvesting into three wagon loads at a time because of the distance. You don’t have a tractor with a PTO so we’ll have to take one to your place to power the wagon unloader.”

“How small are the pellets?”

“The pieces are maybe an inch long. They’ll go up the auger that came with the silo.”

“How much hay should we expect?”

“We got fifteen tons per acre with the first cutting. This second one will go twelve or thirteen. Forty acre field, around 500 tons. Silo holds around 1,000 tons.”

“The oats?”

“Sixty bushels per acre with 80 acres planted. Figure on 2,400-2,500 bushels. Corn will go 150 bushels per acre or more. We have 120 acres of corn so your third will amount to about 6,000 bushels. The corn silo is the largest of the three and you’ll be feeding from all three silos. I’m fairly sure we’ll have them close to full in the three years I mentioned. If not, the fourth year will see them completely full.”

“What’s the determining factor?”

“The same as always, rain. In the spring you want mostly dry fields so you can plant early. Then you need enough rain to grow the crops but not so much you can’t cultivate. We don’t like to use pesticides and herbicides because of the expense and the fact that pesticides and herbicides could taint the grain. We use manure and have the soil tested to add lime and whatever else it needs. Anhydrous if it’s low on nitrogen. Real pain in the behind with that stuff, since people steal it to make speed.”

“I’ll have everything set up and ready to go when you start the alfalfa harvest.”

“It’s a shame they have to truck a tractor over to our place.”

“Does that mean you want to buy a tractor?”

“Yes it does. Something old with a PTO is all we’d need. Like an old John Deere or an old Ford.”

“Ok, we’ll look around.”

We found an old 1953 "Golden Jubilee" tractor, the model that replaced the 8N. It ran well enough for our immediate needs but would need a complete rebuild and coat of paint between the time the oats came in and the corn came in. Kristin called Don and told him we had acquired a NAA Ford tractor to supply PTO power. Kristin shopped around and found a dealer who could get the parts to rebuild the engine, transmission and carburetor. He had the paint. Fortunately, there wasn’t any rust anywhere indicating the tractor had received excellent care. Being 7 years older than both our vehicles meant the paint was faded worse than the car and pickup.

The Ford engine used sleeves and you could get a set of sleeves with or without pistons. A typical engine rebuilt required a set of sleeves and rings, the valves ground and the crankshaft bearings replaced. Sometimes, you needed to have the crankshaft turned and balanced. Add a carburetor rebuild, points, condenser, rotor and distributor cap plus new plugs and filters and you were good to go unless you needed new spark plug wires or a coil. The manual transmission that was relatively easy to rebuild and usually the generator and or starter went to an electrical shop to have the armature turned and brushes replaced plus bushings as required.

A new government forecast about the possibility of a coming solar storm warns that it could eliminate – at least temporarily across large swaths of the world – power grids, air travel and communications, including those operating financial services and emergency systems, as well as GPS functions and even cell phones.

“Is this it? We aren’t getting any younger. If it doesn’t happen soon, we might just miss out.”

“Which are you referring to Jason, the Saudi missiles or the potential solar storm?”

“The solar storm. Nature can be more predictable than people. If the Saudis do have missiles, they’ve had them for ten years. And, they did give Israel a free pass to attack Iran to use their airspace to attack Iran a few years back. Several writers have mentioned CMEs. Fleataxi and Jerry, for certain.”

“Is there a difference between a solar storm and a CME?”

“Both are classified as solar storms. A CME is much more severe than geomagnetic solar storms. Sunspots run in cycles of about 11 years with low levels of sunspots being called solar minimums and high levels called solar maximums. High level mess up communications. A massive CME can be several orders of magnitude higher than a solar maximum. We’re talking of natural EMP of massive levels. Observations revealed that the solar cycle is a magnetic cycle with an average duration of 22 years. However,

because very nearly all manifestations of the solar cycle are insensitive to magnetic polarity, it remains common usage to speak of the ‘11-year solar cycle’”.

“If that’s what we have to prepare for, what more can we do?”

“Everything electrical that’s connected to long lines has to be disconnected and sheltered in faraday cages.”

“Sounds complicated.”

“We have to install relays for disconnects and build grounded faraday cages. We can build the cages out of fine copper mesh. The key is to have mesh with spaces which are smaller than the wavelength of the EMP. Then, everything has to be grounded. We’re going to have to pull the PV panels and store them. We’ll be on generator power when we lose power. Have to use those to charge the batteries.”

“Won’t they be burned out up in the garage?”

“More faraday cages and we can protect them too.”

“How long do we have?”

“Hard to say. They haven’t announced either a CME or solar storm headed this way. Let’s shake a leg and get everything protected first. Then, we can watch and wait.”

“Why don’t you do those things and I’ll put that new software on the computer? Once I input the stocks of foods we have on hand, we can fill in based on what the program recommends.”

“Sure, but I’ll need help lowering the PV panels once they’re detached. Will that be a problem?”

“It shouldn’t be. You want me on the ground stacking them?”

“That was my first thought. Before I do that, I should drive down to Ankeny and get more ground rods, cable and fine mesh for the faraday cages.”

“You do that and I’ll verify the inventory in our old program, adjust the balances and import it into the new program. It will take me about three days.”

“Good, it will take me that long to disconnect the PV panels and connections. Should work out about right.”

“Where are you going to store them?”

“Under the stairs leading down to the shelter. I’ll stand them upright and pack them as tight as I can.”

“Anything else we need to do?”

“Pull all of the radios and cover the generators.”

“I’ll see you when you get back.”

“Find everything you need?”

“I did. That copper mesh isn’t cheap. I got that, some heavier one inch mesh to support the fine mesh and some ground rods plus 6 gauge wire to connect the cages to the grounds. I also picked up some resin core solder and a portable torch so I can bond the corners where the mesh meets. To be totally confident that the cages will work the guy suggested we set the generators on mesh and make sure it’s connected to the covers. How’s the inventory coming?”

“I compared our computer inventory to our physical inventory and noted the differences. I’ll input them and install the new software. Once that’s done, I’ll import the data to the new program and do a printout. We can go over that and make a shopping list. I know for a fact that some things are high, some about right and probably only a few low. I’ll make sure everything is about right or higher. I can’t really see the need to bring everything up to our supply of beans and rice.”

I didn’t say anything, remembering that we had about 2,200 pounds of rice or 44 bags. For just the two of us, it was a 44 year supply. We also had about a ton of pinto beans and a half ton of assorted other dry beans. We also had two cases of Beano tablets to allow our systems to adjust to the beans, rice and corn diet. We agreed that whatever was left when we passed on would be divided into two shares; one for David and Melody and the other for Kristin’s family. In fact, everything we had would be divided between the two recipients. My things would go the David and her things to her family.

“This is getting old.”

“What is?”

“Well, we’re prepared, right? Every time it looks like something is going to happen, we check our inventories, fill in the holes, buy more ammo and start moving, or get ready to move, things to the shelter.”

“Bad things happen in threes.”

“And, we’ve had three?”

“Right, the HEMP, Volcanos and the Chinese invasion. Don’t know for certain what number four will be, but it should be a doozy. The only problem with that is it changes the number from three to nine.”

“I looked that up, you know.”

“Looked what up?”

“Doozy. It’s slang for a remarkable or excellent thing. Since we’re talking something bad, I guess it would be remarkable rather than excellent. I’ll input the inventory corrections after supper and have a printout we can go over late this evening or tomorrow morning.”

“Let’s do it tonight if possible and you can go shopping tomorrow.”

“Jack Black, Demolition Man.”

“Long time, no hear.”

“Been busy. What’s your take on this solar storm business?”

“Don’t know what to think. We’re getting prepared, just in case.”

“How do you protect those PV panels?”

“I’m taking them down and storing them. I bought a roll of fine copper screen, 50 mesh, and 4’ wide by 100’ long plus one inch mesh to support the fine mesh. I’ll make faraday cages for things we have to protect.”

“Where you get that?”

“Ankeny. Five twenty five plus tax for a roll. Came to almost six hundred. Also bought grounding rods and 6 gauge cable to connect the cages to the ground rods.”

“Maybe we should do that.”

“I have more screen than I can use. Same with the cable. Pick up some grounding rods and you can buy what I have left over.”

“Deal. Could I trade labor for the cable and mesh?”

“Doing what?”

“Helping you dismantle your solar setup.”

“Just you?”

“Horny Toad will lend a hand.”

“Hells bells, we’ll get it done in a day.”

“Tell you what. If you help us each take down our systems, I’ll pay you for the materials in cash.”

“Sure. I figured it would take me three days anyway. That would leave Sapphire free to put away our purchases and update the inventory.”

“You’re buying more? Are you nuts?”

“Could be. There are some things you can never have too much of. Coffee and toilet paper come to mind. If I could get a large diesel tank, I’d add it to the one we have. The rent on the tanker isn’t bad but it only holds nine thousand gallons.”

“How big of a tank are you looking for?”

“As big as I can afford. It would have to be used and certified not to leak.”

“I know where you can get a 15,000 gallon tank. It’s not certified, but it’s free. Plus it didn’t leak when they pulled it out of the ground.”

“Fiberglass?”

“Yeah. That okay?”

“I’ll call the excavator.”

“Don’t. Horny Toad will dig the hole for you after we get all of the solar done. You’ll have to pay transportation from Walcott and hire a crane to set the tank in place.”

“I’ll get on it. When will everything happen?”

“Say a week from today. Have the crane at your place around noon. The driver will load around 8am and be on the road by 8:30 to 9. That should put him here by noon. Don’t forget the plumbing.”

“Copy. See you tomorrow.”

“Sun up.”

“Jack Black clear.”

“Demolition Man clear.”

One Tin Soldier – Chapter 21

“What was that all about?”

“DM and Horny Toad will help me with the panels and I’ll help them with theirs. I’m adding a fifteen thousand gallon diesel tank. Tank is free except for delivery charges. Horny Toad will dig the hole. I wonder how much fifteen thousand gallons of diesel will run.”

“If you’ll settle for biodiesel, twenty two thousand five hundred. My brothers have their setup running and have been selling it for one fifty a gallon. Petroleum diesel is running two seventy five a gallon.”

“We can dump the tanker into the new tank, add six thousand gallons of biodiesel plus top off the tanker.”

“Don’t forget to add anti-gel to the biodiesel. Interstate Products sells it in five gallon pails for one twenty five a pail. We’d better get a pallet of eighteen pails so we have it for future needs.”

“Can you handle that?”

“No problem. I’ll call tomorrow and use my debit card. That will give us thirty four thousand gallons of diesel, right?”

“Right. Should last us for years and we can get more from your family. What do they use as a heat source?”

“Methane from the manure.”

“Soybeans?”

“Rapeseed. Specifically canola.”

“That’s high yield isn’t it?”

“One hundred twenty seven gallons of oil per acre. They use it exclusively for their cooking oil needs too. When they change the old cooking oil out, they save it and use it in the biodiesel production. That new section they bought is planted solely in rapeseed. They produce over eighty thousand gallons per year. Those are averages, not their highest yields.”

“Will they sell us what we need?”

“Blood is thicker than water. If we’re willing to pay their going price, no problem. Plus they’ll take gold at the spot price. Here’s the printout. Check what I’ve marked to buy more of.”

Kristin had determined that we had up to forty years' worth of some supplies and that the lowest quantity we had was ten years for the majority. She noted what she wanted to buy and the quantities. I noted that she wanted to butcher a beef and can all the meat. We weren't short of jars, lids or rings and canned beef has good shelf life. It appeared that I'd be helping with butchering 100 or so chickens. I wonder if she could get Melody to help her.

"The anti-gel will ship today. I'm leaving now for Costco, Sam's and Hy-Vee. It will be late when I get home. They're picking up a beef and four hogs sometime today. Two hogs are going to be all smoked meat and sausage and the others treated like normal. They know what to do and you can pick out which animals you think they should take."

"See you when you get home."

"There's the truck. You'd better check on the livestock."

I picked out the largest steer and four hogs that ran about 250 pounds for them to load. I had done my chores much earlier and got out the ladder to access the roof from outside. I had all of the panels disconnected by the time DM and Horny Toad showed up. When we stopped for lunch, the panels were all down and just had to be moved to storage. There was room in the basement of the barn to store the panels even though the barn only had a very small basement off the end of the tunnel.

We had time to fabricate the faraday cages and solder the seams. I'd been writing down how much screen was coming off the roll as we used it. I used thirty six feet off the roll, leaving sixty four for them to divide up. DM gave me a location where we could meet the following morning. By the end of the day two days later, we had their panels stored and faraday cages built to protect everything. Horny Toad said he'd see me tomorrow and start on the hole for the diesel tank. He suggested that I get a pump and pipe for the new tank so we could hook it into the current line.

When I got home, I got four stakes and a spool of yellow line to mark the location for the new tank. We were almost entirely out of room for more additions. Melody had been over the past two days helping Kristin butcher and pluck chickens. They'd done one hundred fifty and Melody took thirty of them home with her. Kristin had both canners running and had canned half and frozen the other half. The canned chicken jars each contained one half chicken, cut up.

The 'new' diesel tank arrived as planned and the crane operator lifted it off the flatbed. I paid the driver and as soon as the tank was set in place, the crane operator, DM and Horny Toad helped me connect the plumbing and we began the backfill with rock followed with soil. I had a pile of leftover soil that I was going to use to fill in some low spots on the second 2½ acres and reseed them.

I called the guy we were renting the tank from and asked him if he could make a couple of trips for us. He wanted time and fuel which I agreed to. He was there the next morning and he moved the tanker so we could empty it into the 'new' tank. I rode with him to Adel to pick up the first nine thousand gallons. We topped off the new tank and I told him I wanted to go back and top off the tanker.

"I don't suppose you'd be interested in selling those three thousand gallons would you?"

"Make me an offer."

"Six thousand."

"Done. You have a tank?"

"A small one, five thousand. It's getting empty."

"Let's do it. I have to help the wife with canning."

We unloaded the fuel at his place and he handed me 60 pictures of Ben Franklin. That increased the amount for fuel from her brothers from fifteen to eighteen thousand gallons. I already had the twenty two five hundred to pay them and his six increased the amount to twenty eight five hundred. Eighteen at one fifty was twenty seven, reducing our cost slightly. When we got back, a Sears delivery truck was just leaving.

"We buy something from Sears?"

"Another twenty-five cubic foot chest freezer. I decided to freeze all of the steaks and some of the roasts. I'll can the rest. Plus we have the four hogs and the other freezers are pretty much full."

"Isn't this stuff going to freezer burn?"

"Nope. It's wrapped in plastic and then Kraft paper. I'm going to put each package in a seal-a-meal. You can help me pack the cut up beef for canning. I changed my mind and called them back. I had them turn one hog into sausage. When they delivered the order, they took another hog to be smoked. We need to sell off those hogs. Any ideas?"

"Maybe DM or Horny Toad. What about David and Melody?"

"We have five available. Why don't you make some calls?"

Previously, we'd had her brother pick up the excess beef and pork and take it to market with theirs. At the moment we didn't have any more market weight beef and we'd sold off the excess hogs out of the first litters of the year. We'd only sold half of the second litters, keeping the gilts for breeding purposes. We'd butchered or were having butch-

ered five leaving five to dispose of. We had a large meat supply and the hogs liked to reproduce so more pork wouldn't be a problem.

"Jack Black, Demolition Man,"

"Go ahead. I was going to call you."

"Ok, you first."

"We have five hogs leftover and we discussed selling two each to you and Horny Toad. Interested?"

"Know where to get them processed?"

"Sure do."

"Ok, I'll take two and ask HT if he wants the other two."

"Great. What can I do for you?"

"We've been awfully lucky when you think about it. Out of the three bad things that happened, the only gunfire was that Chinese thing. I got a feeling that if we get a number four; we're going to be fighting people from the cities looking to get what they can."

"That's a distinct possibility."

"Ok. So, here's my question. If that happens can we count on you to get involved as backup? I only ask because of how bad you were hurt in that Chinese deal. Are you gun-shy?"

"Nope. It took a while to recover and I couldn't shoot the Tac-50 for over a year. We're both up to speed now. Sure would like to have some kind of body armor that would protect more than an 8 by 10 spot on my chest and back. I tried to bring up the website for Pinnacle Armor but I got a 404 message."

"Dragon Skin?"

"Well yeah, just because the military doesn't like it doesn't mean it's not any good."

"It's expensive."

"So I've heard. I think we could handle it if we could get some of their Level IV stuff."

"They have a Level V that's not available to the general public. It may provide better coverage than Interceptor but it weighs twice as much and failed the Army tests."

"It would beat what we have."

"What do you have, Second Chance?"

"No. We don't have any body armor. Second Chance went out of business back in '05 over that Zylon fiasco."

"They were bought up. They were owned by Armor Holdings and then Armor Holdings was purchased by BAE Systems. They're still making body armor up in Michigan. Thing is, it's all that soft stuff and no good for rifle fire."

"There's no way we're going to California for two sets of body armor, regardless of how good or bad it is."

"I know a guy who works there. If you can give me a full set of measurements, I can wire him the money and fax the specs. If you're willing to pay the freight, I can have the stuff in 3 days."

"I'll get back to you DM."

"Later JB."

"DM will take two hogs and he'll check with Horny Toad on the other two. We got to talking body armor. He thinks he can get us Level V Dragon Skin from Pinnacle. Interested?"

"Full coverage?"

"I wouldn't say full coverage, but it has the most. It weighs a lot though."

"How much?"

"Maybe 40-45 pounds."

"Too heavy. What was the stuff they had before Interceptor?"

"PASGT."

"Should be fairly cheap. Can we get it?"

"I'd have to check. I'll need your measurements."

"I'll get the tape and you can get them yourself."

Hmm...

“Jack Black, Demolition Man.”

“Come back.”

“Horny Toad will take two hogs. Can they pick all of them up at your place?”

“Affirm. I’m going to sell the fifth one to Jose Cuervo and they can get all five at the same time. My other half says no go, but I’ve got our measurements. She said PASGT.”

“Hold one and I’ll get a pen and paper. Ok, go.”

“Her first. Neck is 15.5, chest is 38, waist is 26, hips are 39 and distance from underarm to waist is 17.5. My neck is 17.5, chest is 44, waist is 38, hips are 39 and distance from underarm to waist is 19.”

“Give me a couple of days. Good enough?”

“Do we have a choice?”

“Not really.”

“Yeah, fax the measurements. Do you need the money now or later?”

“Pay me when I pick up the pork.”

“I ordered the armor.”

“Help me box up this canned meat and get it to the shelter.”

“Ok. I’m going to call and have them pick up all five hogs. DM and Horny Toad will take four and we can set the fifth aside in case David wants it.”

“We haven’t seen much of them lately. Melody helped with the chickens but I sort of thought they’d do a better job of keeping in touch.”

“I see him driving by occasionally, but not lately. He waves if he sees me. Been a while since I’ve talked to him.”

“The last time I recall was when I told him my brothers about the wagon.”

“It has been a while. Box the meat you said?”

“Yes, just put them back in the boxes and we’ll use the 2 wheeler to get them to the shelter. It’s only five boxes.”

“But they’re quarts, not pints.”

“Great for stew or something quick. Stew only improves with age.”

Our relations with the other prep minded folks in the area had maintained the nom de guerre each had. It was like being on the forums where almost everyone had a ‘handle’. I figured it was time to shorten the names to something like DM and HT, JB and JC. The ladies could keep Sapphire and Brandy. Hadn’t met DMs and HTs other halves, assuming they had one. They were big on OpSec and I half expected to be blindfolded when I went to help. We were all in the same general AO southeast of Ames.

“Where does that leave us on supplies Kristin?”

“Eleven years across the board, minimum, except for fresh meat. Between the frozen and canned meats, we have eleven years’ worth of those too. Some things are much higher but eleven years minimum. With the greenhouse, we can fill in a few holes and probably stretch it to fifteen years in a pinch. Want me to start beans and keep a cooked pot handy all of the time?”

“Beans and withit?”

“What’s withit?”

“Oh that. We eat beans and whatever else we decide to have with it. Don’t recall where I heard that.”

“I called Julie and she upped the order for the store. I got tenderloins, Maid Rite and fries. The bread guy was there delivering buns when I went by and I got him to explain how they make their buns. I’m sure I can duplicate them but they’ll be whole wheat if we have to grind our own flour.”

“Did you get the recipe?”

“I did and he said it makes great loaves too. Need some of those large loaf pans but he told me where to get them.”

“What size?”

“Four by four and a half by sixteen. I think I’ll buy six.”

“Local or mail order?”

“Des Moines. I’ll get them tomorrow. I kept out some of the ground sirloin in case you wanted to can it. We can make patties or meat balls.”

“Meat balls sound good since we have several boxes of Maid Rite.”

“Can you help with that?”

“Right after I get the chores done and let the stock out.”

“Don’t forget to add the anti-gel when it comes in.”

“Right. I’ll add five gallons to the new tank and seven and a half to the tanker. I made fifteen hundred off the biodiesel.”

“Do tell.”

“After we topped off the tank, there were 3,000 gallons left in the tanker. I sold it to him for two dollars a gallon. It’s not much, but I saved us fifteen hundred on our fuel purchase. That gives us a total of thirty four thousand on hand. I called the propane dealer and gas dealer to top both of those tanks.”

Two weeks later, the meat had arrived and been distributed. The body armor came in and it was a perfect fit. We checked our ammo supplies and set out the reloadable brass. Kristin called the guy who reloaded our .50BMG and told him she wanted the 7.62 loaded to match specs with Sierra 175gr MatchKing SPBT. The empty .50BMG would be reloaded the same as before. We also had him reload all the other ammo with either JHP or JSP and commercial equivalent powder loads. He said it would take a week.

The first indication of trouble came with a showing of the Northern Lights, aurora borealis. They were quite a sight to see. I hadn’t seen them since the ‘50s. We didn’t experience an EMP allowing us to conclude that we hadn’t been hit by a CME.

“CME?”

“I don’t think so. Solar storm probably. If there is a CME, we’ll know it because the phones and power will be out. It’s likely that the radio and TV will be down too. Do you suppose that WHO got a larger fuel tank?”

“Don’t have a clue Jason. BUT, if we experience a CME, it won’t make much difference. Think we should add some of those Alpha Delta air gap insulators?”

“Couldn’t hurt; don’t know how much they’ll help though.”

“I’ll get some tomorrow. You can stay here and keep an eye on the place. Want me to pick up some 100 pound propane bottles?”

“What for?”

“Trade goods.”

“Oh, ok. Will you have time to stop at a liquor store and pick up some trade goods there too?”

“I can work it in. How’s your supply of Kool’s?”

“Are we ok on money?”

“Yes.”

“All they have, but at least 60 cartons.”

“When are you going to quit smoking?”

“When they bury me.”

“Sign two blank checks for on your account or give me your debit card and PIN number.”

“Here you go. PIN is the last four of my SSN, 2950.”

“You want good booze or the cheap stuff?”

“Let me check what’s on hand. Give me five minutes.”

“Ready to copy?”

“Un-huh.”

“One case each of Maker’s Mark, Jack Black, Single Barrel, Jose Cuervo 1800, Bombay Sapphire gin, Absolute vodka, Chivas Regal and a mixed case containing Grand Mariner, sweet and dry vermouth, Drambuie and other things we need to make cocktails. Jose Cuervo margarita mix and four cases of Squirt. You like the Collins so four cases of Collins mix. Trade goods should be the same except cheaper brands. Jim Beam instead of Maker’s Mark and the Jack Daniels, cheap tequila, Popov vodka and a cheap blended scotch.”

“I hope someone helps me load. I’ll get the liquor last and come straight home.”

“You want Coke Classic?”

“Sure. I’ll get some Seven up as a mixer.”

When she returned, the pickup and trailer were loaded down. She had an even dozen 25 gallon (100 pound) filled propane bottles, 90 cartons of Kool’s, the Alpha Delta air gap arrestors and all of that booze. She moved the cigarettes and lightening arrestors leaving me to move the remainder. I put the propane in the garage on the end opposite

the generators. The liquor went into the storage building. I rechecked to see if I'd missed anything and found 30 cartons of Camel filters. They went into the storage building next to my supply of Kool's.

I hadn't told Kristin how many cartons or how many bottles we still had. I had 200 cartons of Kool's and while most of the liquor bottles, the first one in each case, had been opened and was in the bar in the bungalow, my list more than doubled what we had on hand.

We had 2 cases each of the four flavors of DiGiorno pizzas, plenty of coke, a diminishing supply of beer and one assorted case of dinner wines. There were enough Maid Rite supplies to supply a busy café for a week. We could refill the beer supply whenever the stuff hit the fan.

All the silos were full so we had the livestock covered and the loft was well supplied with straw. The reloader bought the ammo and as soon as we had it paid for, we headed to the range to check it out. It was definitely Match grade and uniform. We spent several hours filling stripper clips with 7.62 and 5.56. The 7.62 went into those quality Radway bandoleers and the 5.56 into some cheap bandoleers we'd gotten off the net.

"David, this is Jason. What's up; long time, no hear."

"Yeah, been really busy. I'm home recuperating."

"Been sick?"

"Got shot."

"Didn't hear it on the news."

"I was doing undercover. They kept my name out of the papers. Drug deal. I can't say much about it since it's an ongoing investigation."

"Look, we butchered a hog and were planning on getting it to you and your family. Do you have room?"

"Freezer space? I pretty sure we do."

"We're long on canned goods too. Have some empty shelves?"

One Tin Soldier – Chapter 22

“Man, I hope to tell you. The Doc said I probably won’t be able to return to my former job due to the nature of my injury.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, I got kneecapped. Both legs. ‘Course, I only felt the first one, I was passed out before they shot the other knee.”

“When would be a good time?”

“Anytime. Melody got a job working for the Sheriff’s Department and I’m home with the kids.”

“How bad is it?”

“Most kneecapping cases don’t injure the patella. In my case, they made a point to shatter the patella on each leg. I’ll have to wear a brace on each leg and will limp for the rest of my life. Our insurance paid all the bills so we’re lucky there. I’ll get a full pension plus disability. Come on over.”

“See you in an hour.”

“Who were you talking to?”

“David. He was working undercover and got shot. Kneecapped in both legs and he’s out of work and on a full pension plus Social Security Disability. Melody is now working for the Sheriff’s Department. Any objection if we give them that hog and some of our supplies?”

“Not at all. Get the ice chests in the back of the pickup and we’ll load up the meat. I’ll go through our commercial goods and give them a portion of those plus some of the home canned food. You can give me a hand once we get the meat moved to the ice chests.”

I won’t say it was a lot of food and neither will I say it was inconsequential. From their point of view, it must have been like they hit a jackpot since it was about six months’ worth of food. From our viewpoint, what’s six months’ worth when you have a minimum eleven year supply? It’s not like David was the son I never had, although that couldn’t be said for Kristin. We had the food and they needed it, end of story.

After we had the food unloaded and put away as directed, David gave us the full story as far as he could. I changed the subject briefly and inquired about the state of their preps, making notes.

“How’s your supply of ammo?”

“Fifteen hundred 7.62 and a thousand 5.56. A thousand .45acp and the same with the 9mmP. Both of those are Lawman FMJ.”

“So you need on the order of thirty-five hundred Radway, four thousand M193, a thousand each .45acp and 9mm +P Gold Dot. What about a shotgun?”

“It’s a 12 gauge, improved cylinder. Don’t have much of that, one case each of 9 pellet Federal low recoil buck and a case of low recoil slugs.”

“A case each will give you enough for now.”

“I don’t have the money Jason.”

“I don’t care David. I’ll bring it over tomorrow. Do you have a vest?”

“It’s a new Second Chance rated at IIIA. Not Zylon.”

“Won’t stop rifle bullets.”

“That’s why I have ESAPI plates, front and back.”

“We bought some PASGT.”

“You got a bee in your bonnet?”

“Could be. Something is going down and we’re not sure what. We’ve done our usual pre-event preparations and I called you about the hog. I was going to sell it to you if you wanted it. When you explained approximately what happened, we decided to plug some of your holes. Trust me, we didn’t hurt ourselves. I’ll bring the ammo over either later today or early tomorrow. See ya.”

“I noticed he didn’t get up while we were there. How bad do you think his injuries are?”

“I suspect that it will take a year for him to heal completely. He’ll have to have physical therapy too. Probably Mary Greeley. I had hoped you could stay home and he’d be my spotter.”

“Isn’t going to happen Jason. You know I don’t mind being your spotter plus my Super Match is just as accurate as yours. It’s a shame we only have one Tac-50. Say, I have an idea. McMillan is in Phoenix, right?”

“Near Sky Harbor airport.”

“How long is the wait?”

“I have no idea anymore. What are you thinking?”

“Get an identical setup as yours. I can redeem some gold with my brother and use that to buy the rifle, scope, accessories, extra magazines and Jet suppressor. AN/PVS-27 nightscope, isn't it? We're good on .50BMG ammo but we could always buy a little more Hornady A-MAX. When my dividends come in, I'll buy my gold back.”

“I'll redeem some too and get two sets of AN/PVS-14 night vision plus those Kevlar MICH helmets. We can mount the night vision on them. That should increase our effectiveness. Are you willing to wear MARPAT? The woodland pattern would be ideal around here.”

“Sure...if we can get something cut for my figure.”

“If they don't have it to fit you, it's their loss. It's made by Popper. Let me check the catalog on the computer.

“Well, they don't sell MARPAT to the public. It's ACUs, ABUs or BDUs.”

“What about Camp Dodge? Do they have a clothing store? Maybe a post exchange?”

“Never set foot on the place. My retired ID is current and I can go there. They probably have clothing sales for ACUs. I don't have any of those rank insignia they use on the uniforms now but I do have the collar pins. Maybe clothing sales can order in MARPAT and the Air Force rank insignia. Meanwhile, I do have BDUs. I'll drive down there tomorrow and see what I can find. I need your shoe size for boots. All military boots are now uniform and available to the public.”

As it turned out, clothing sales had MCCUUs to supply the recruiters in the central Iowa area. They were available in dessert and woodland MARPAT. They also had the Velcro rank insignia for all branches of the military. I got the Senior Master Sergeant Insignia for my uniforms and Technical Sergeant Insignia for Kristin. I bought three sets apiece in each of the two colors, a total of twelve uniforms. I also bought two pairs of boots apiece. Covers were a boonie hat and a utility cover in each color for each of us. I knew her hat size because of a trip to buy new straw cowboy hats. I picked up Camelbak 3 liter hydration packs in both colors, a total of four, from the PX.

“I got the uniforms.”

“Good. I converted some gold, called McMillan and they'll ship the rifle within a week to Smith down in Des Moines. He said he'd handle it for fifty bucks. The suppressor and the MUNS will be shipped directly since I'm a Deputy.”

“Reserve Deputy.”

“Yeah well, so what? I contacted Hornady directly about an ammo purchase. I wired money to McMillan and Hornady and it even covers shipping. Think a pallet load will be enough ammo?”

“Who are you buying for, the whole Canadian sniper force?”

“Not at all, we actually practice and brass does wear out. Your rifle is Olive Drab so I got mine in Dark Earth. I got the same parts kits as you did and the same scopes. Scope mount is 60MOA instead of 30MOA.”

“Sounds good. Are you sure you want to lug a heavy rifle around?”

“Hey, it’s not like I’m not in good shape. I plan to carry the TAC-50, my pistol and the Super Match. You’re the one who needs to get back in shape.”

Was that where this all started? I think it started with me getting in shape way back when. Were we trying to take coal to Newcastle? You can look it up if you want, but what the expression refers to is doing something foolish. Newcastle in the United Kingdom was a coal mining town until recently and to quote, “Selling coal to Newcastle is an idiom of British origin describing a foolhardy or pointless action.”

When we had the discussion concerning body armor, I was all for the Dragon Skin, regardless of the cost. Kristin had a counter argument based on our radio system.

“Remember when we had the discussion about the radio antennas?”

“Not really.”

“I said you should have the Yaesu radio with 400 watts output. You said the secret wasn’t the radio, but the antenna. Specifically, even the best radio isn’t worth a damn on a lousy antenna.”

“What’s that have to do with Dragon Skin versus PASGT?”

“We have very good rifles, don’t we?”

“As a matter of fact...”

“And we rather proficient with them aren’t we?”

“Yes, we can...”

“So unless somebody does something stupid like stick their head up before someone else verifies that the targets are really down, PASGT should be adequate.”

“If it was adequate, why did the military replace it with Interceptor and the MICH?”

“Not everything the military does is right. What’s the official military rifle?”

“The M-16. Ok, you’ve made your point.”

As I pointed out earlier we got PASGT vests and MICH helmets and the helmet mounted night vision. We had been ready for fifteen or twenty years. If something didn’t happen soon, I wouldn’t be involved. We could have moved to Adel at any time and chose not to do so to keep just a little distance between her family and us. They were well prepared but not to our extent. They had 3 M1 Garand rifles, a few crates of Greek surplus ammo, shotguns with the original long barrels and a shortened smoothbore with rifle sights for deer hunting. I know for a fact that on top of the hunting shells they bought, each has a case of slugs and another of buckshot. They only needed one caliber of handgun ammo, .45acp to feed their M1911s.

◦

“Do you see that?” I pointed.

“Sirius?”

“Sirius is over there.”

“Comet?”

“That or an asteroid. Comets are distinguished from asteroids by the presence of a coma or a tail. However, extinct comets that have passed close to the Sun many times have lost nearly all of their volatile ices and dust, and may come to resemble small asteroids. Asteroids are thought to have a different origin from comets, having formed inside the orbit of Jupiter rather than in the outer Solar System. These have somewhat blurred the distinction between asteroids and comets.”

“Could it be a Centaur?”

“What’s that?”

“Centaurids are an unstable orbital class of minor planets that behave with characteristics of both asteroids and comets.”

“That would explain why it’s visible.”

“It might be visible because of sunlight reflecting off its surface.”

“I noticed it last week. I thought it was Sirius, but looked to another part of the sky and found Sirius right where it is supposed to be. I assumed we would hear about it on the news. Nobody is talking about it. It seems to be getting larger.”

“That sounds like that movie.”

“Which one?”

“*Deep Impact*. What was that song you were humming earlier?”

“*One Tin Soldier*. It was written by Lambert and Potter. The first recording was by The Original Caste. When Tom Laughlin decided to use it in *Billy Jack*, it was recorded by Jinx Dawson of Coven. The story behind the movie *Billy Jack* is that Laughlin and Taylor, she’s his wife you know, came up with the idea in South Dakota while he was meeting her parents in Winner, South Dakota and what it’s really about is the treatment of the Lakota. There were several versions of the song on you tube.”

“Do you know the lyrics?”

“I’ll have to look them up. I have them in a document file on my computer.”

“Where can we find out more about the light in the sky?”

“Maybe Space.com. They have that piece on solar storms. The internet is up, right?”

“I downloaded that story so of course it is.”

“I’ll check Space.com and maybe Wiki. Someone has to have some information on that light.”

“Just remember what Morgan Freeman said to Tea Leoni. *We always thought the deadline for public knowledge was the publication of next year’s budget since we’ve spent more money than we can account for. That won’t happen for two weeks. I don’t suppose I could prevail upon you to wait two weeks in the name of national security?*”

“Her reply was, *Two weeks? There’s no such thing as two weeks in the news business.*”

“Here are those lyrics you wanted for *One Tin Soldier*.”

*Listen, children, to a story
That was written long ago,
'Bout a kingdom on a mountain
And the valley-folk below.*

*On the mountain was a treasure
Buried deep beneath the stone,
And the valley-people swore
They’d have it for their very own.*

*Go ahead and hate your neighbor,
Go ahead and cheat a friend.
Do it in the name of Heaven,
You can justify it in the end.
There won't be any trumpets blowing
Come the judgment day,
On the bloody morning after....
One tin soldier rides away.*

*So the people of the valley
Sent a message up the hill,
Asking for the buried treasure,
Tons of gold for which they'd kill.*

*Came an answer from the kingdom,
"With our brothers we will share
All the secrets of our mountain,
All the riches buried there."*

*Go ahead and hate your neighbor,
Go ahead and cheat a friend.
Do it in the name of Heaven,
You can justify it in the end.
There won't be any trumpets blowing
Come the judgment day,
On the bloody morning after....
One tin soldier rides away.*

*Now the valley cried with anger,
"Mount your horses! Draw your sword!"
And they killed the mountain-people,
So they won their just reward.*

*Now they stood beside the treasure,
On the mountain, dark and red.
Turned the stone and looked beneath it...
"Peace on Earth" was all it said.*

*Go ahead and hate your neighbor,
Go ahead and cheat a friend.
Do it in the name of Heaven,
You can justify it in the end.
There won't be any trumpets blowing
Come the judgment day,
On the bloody morning after....
One tin soldier rides away.*

*Go ahead and hate your neighbor,
Go ahead and cheat a friend.
Do it in the name of Heaven,
You can justify it in the end.
There won't be any trumpets blowing
Come the judgment day,
On the bloody morning after....
One tin soldier rides away.*

“I’ll tell you, I searched the net to find out what the song actually meant. One fella had a website where he discussed what it meant to him. I agreed wholeheartedly with him. Here, I printed it out.”

This song never fails to give me goosebumps. It is definitely my all-time favorite song. The song has powerful meaning on many fronts to-which I will get to soon.

I can still remember hearing this song as the opening sequence of the movie, Billy Jack is happening. There are beautiful wild stallions running in slow motion through a canyon. The horses are running for their lives. They are being chased by a wealthy banker (Posner) and his police deputy friend. They are going to shoot them and sell the meat to dog food companies. They cross over onto an Indian Reservation. As they raise their rifles, ready to shoot, the deputy senses something in the air and hesitates. Through the woods we see the legs of a white horse slowly making its way out. On top of the horse is my all-time hero, Billy Jack, complete with a Wovoka hat (A hat worn by the Paiute Messiah, Wovoka. Wovoka was the visionary of the Ghost Dance). Billy says, You’re illegally on Indian land. Posner replies, Sorry about that. I guess we got caught up in the chase and crossed over. Billy says, You’re a liar. Billy Jack-the ‘One Tin Soldier’-all by himself with his convictions, stands up against several men and defends the innocent horses against slaughter.

The song is much more than just the theme from the movie, to me. It is so powerful. What does it mean to me? It means many things. First, what the song is talking about is what happened historically to Native Americans. The ‘mountain people’ are, no doubt, Native Americans. The ‘valley people’ are white and black ‘Christians’. I put ‘Christians’ in quotes because they sure did not act like it. I include blacks because they were not innocent in the near genocide of the Native Americans, either. As a matter of fact, an all-black infantry referred to as ‘the buffalo soldiers’ were used specifically as ‘Indian fighters’. They contributed to many massacres of defenseless women, children and old people.

The song, not only is general in what it is saying, but also specific. The treasure, buried beneath the stone, on the mountain, refers to the sacred Black Hills of South Dakota. Analogous to the Black Hills would be Mecca to a Muslim, Rome to a Catholic or Jerusalem to Jews, Christians and Muslims. The ‘treasure’ can be viewed two different ways. From the Native American (The Sioux aka ‘Lakota’, in this case) perspective as is

seen in the song, the 'treasure' is not some concrete, material thing. The 'treasure' is spiritual. To the white settlers, protected by George Armstrong Custer, the 'treasure' was gold in 'them there hills'.

So, the 'people of the valley' went into the Black Hills under the protection of the US Army. They did it to take gold from the sacred Black Hills. At this time there was a very real idea of what was known as 'manifest destiny'. 'Manifest destiny' is a protestant Christian idea that God wanted capitalism and Christianity to spread and anything in its way was to be overcome. So, now think of the lyrics: Go ahead and hate your neighbor. Go ahead and cheat a friend. Do it in the name of heaven. You can justify it in the end. To me, the lyrics are talking about how 'Christians' (I put Christians in quotation marks because I differentiate pseudo-Christians from true Christians) thought they were rightfully entitled to steal. The lyrics, Came an answer from the kingdom, "With our brothers we will share. All the secrets of our mountain. All the riches buried there," shows the Sioux were willing to share if asked. They referred to not only themselves as 'brothers', but everyone. Isn't that, in fact, how Jesus Christ wanted all people to consider each other? So, who were the Christians and who were the savages here?

The part of the song that really makes me get goosebumps and tear up is: Now they stood beside the treasure on the mountain dark and red. Turned the stone and looked beneath it, 'Peace on Earth was all it said'. The materialistic 'valley people' had no capacity to understand the difference between the material and the spiritual. They thought that one led to the other (Material wealth meant that one was in God's favor. That is the basis for what is known as "The Protestant Ethic"). The 'treasure' was 'Peace on Earth'! The treasure was sharing.

Only one person understood, in the end, how wrong it all was (in the song). On the bloody morning after... One Tin Soldier rides away. There is that theme again. The solitary individual who has a mind of their own and goes against the grain. They do it because it is right. They do it because they have a conscience. So much wrong happens because it is human nature to follow the crowd-that is, to want to fit in. It takes extraordinary courage to not follow the crowd. By virtue of not following the crowd, one is not going to be popular. But, 'popular' is not necessarily what is right or just.

In the movie, Billy Jack stands up to the townspeople because he has a conscience. Suffice it is to say this song and movie has had a huge impact on my way of thinking. It does not make me popular. But, I choose to have a conscience and not to follow the crowd.

"Indian lover, huh?"

"Actually, I sort of figure it was written by a Lakota."

"Did you find out anything about the light in the sky?"

"Not one word."

“Spooky.”

“I did find pieces on asteroids though.”

“Were there any references to that light?”

“None.”

“Think we should buy a telescope?”

“I can’t imagine why.”

“We could get a better look and maybe tell what it is.”

“Look, if you want to get a starter telescope to watch it, it’s all the same to me. I wouldn’t think we’d want to spend more than five hundred. I checked the web and a prominent name is Meade. They run from less than one hundred up to thirty six thousand according to the video on their website.”

“Did you see any that you liked?”

“The Meade 90AZ-ADR Altazimuth Refractor #04085 is about two hundred. It has a 90mm whatever. They refer to a 70mm but I couldn’t find it on their website. I did an internet search and brought up a product manual and I assume it’s an older model they discontinued.”

“Can we get one in Des Moines?”

“I checked and they have one in stock. I asked them to hold it until noon tomorrow.”

“Did they agree?”

“Yes, but only until noon. He said they’ve sold quite a few telescopes recently.”

Since we were sort of in between checks, I picked a model that we could afford without hurting ourselves. Had we lived near San Diego, we could have gone to Mt. Palomar and begged for a peek. We got the telescope and took it home. I followed the instructions in the owner’s manual to assemble the tripod and mount the telescope on the tripod. I completed 11 of 12 steps and the last had to be completed after dark. There were also six steps to assemble/align the red dot viewfinder. Once that was done, I got the laptop and loaded the software and made sure the cable connections were secure. Since the manual said to do the sixth alignment step and try out the telescope during the daylight, we checked out a barn across the river.

One Tin Soldier – Chapter 23

An hour after dark, we took the telescope out and hooked everything up. I completed the last step and booted the computer program. I enter Sirius and the laptop showed me a star map indicating Sirius. This was strictly a manual mount. Next, we cranked the telescope until the small sight picked up the unknown object. The telescope came with a low power 25mm eyepiece, a high power 9mm eyepiece and we bought the optional Barrow Lens which doubled the magnification of the telescope. We both took a look through the 25mm eyepiece and switched to the 9mm eyepiece.

“Wow, check this out. Still can’t tell what it is, but it’s lots bigger.”

“How do these controls work? It’s not quite centered.”

“Turn this knob for vertical and that knob for horizontal.”

“It’s centered.”

“Want the Barrow Lens?”

“Yes, please. Oh wow it’s tumbling, I think. You look Jason.”

“You could be right. Your eyes must be better than mine, I can’t real tell for sure.”

“So what is it?”

“One of three things, an asteroid, a dead comet or a centaur.”

“I think a dead comet or small asteroid. There is no coma or tail.”

“Centaurids have been observed which don’t exhibit a coma and later do. The reverse is also true. I looked them up after you mentioned them. Wiki brought up the Greek half man thing but I looked at the other choices and found the minor planets.”

“I don’t want to stay up all night watching. It would be nice if we could leave the telescope right here with the present settings.”

“What would that tell you?”

“If it’s getting bigger for one thing. And something about its trajectory. If it’s not headed straight for the Earth, it should move off center over the period of a few nights.”

“I’ll go get my rain slicker and cover it up.”

“Thanks. I’ll start some coffee; I want to ask you a couple of questions.”

“It’s covered up. What did you want to know?”

“Did you see Billy Jack?”

“I did. The movie was meant to portray Billy Jack as a sympathetic character and it pulled it off quite well. I never really understood the One Tin Soldier bit until I found that piece I gave you to read. Of course, the movie starred Laughlin, his wife Delores Taylor and their daughter Teresa Kelly. She was the one that sang the song. That movie cost eight hundred grand to make and had a box office of sixty five million. I think someone released a DVD, but I’m not really sure.”

“What’s with all the different names?”

“I don’t really know. Laughlin goes by about eight different names. Taylor kept her maiden name. I don’t know what’s with the kids’ names. They have three children and they probably all have different names. He’s older than I am by twelve years. Puts him in his eighties, I guess. They live in Camarillo, California. I just liked the movie. It’s what that guy said in the paper I gave you.”

“So you see yourself as One Tin Soldier?”

“I’m no Billy Jack if that’s what you’re asking. Since I never saw combat, I do consider myself as a tin soldier. I did twenty four in the service and only ever fired a weapon on the range, excluding my personal weapons. I don’t know any martial arts. Period. I’d like to think I’d stand up for people who were being treated the way the mountain people were in that film. Did you know Laughlin went to school with Gene Wilder and beat him up once? I don’t like Wilder’s films so it didn’t bother me when I learned that.”

“I didn’t see it. Jack didn’t want to go. I think he may have taken Cheryl. He was such a dreamboat until we said I do. It was okay for the first year but he didn’t want children at our age and always used condoms. Then, he started to have to stay late at work a few nights a week. I didn’t suspect anything at the time. Then when it looked like the busy season was over, he still worked a couple of nights a week. I was totally naïve and didn’t suspect anything was wrong. The third year, he became somewhat hostile. Of course, I thought it was mostly my fault.

“Then, I came home from work early and you pretty much know the rest. I thought we had a fair amount in savings, but he’d been spending it on her. That’s why I got my Comet and forty grand plus attorney’s fees. His Daddy jumped right into the mess and I told him to talk to my attorney. He was a good one and that gave me the head start. We’ve spent a fair amount of money over the past twenty years and even adjusted for inflation, I have more than I started with not to mention my livestock and so forth.”

“Just so you know, I made you the beneficiary of my will. I would ask that you consider David getting my firearms since you have pretty much the same things as I have. You can’t shoot two TAC-50s at the same time. I have no known health issue beside the di-

abetes they discovered when I got shot that time. The Duetact 30+2 seems to keep that in check. I take an 81mg aspirin to keep my blood thinned out. Keep that in mind if I happen to raise my head too fast again. The Doc said my blood pressure was on the high side and if we can't get it down with exercise, I'll have to start something for that. He said maybe one of the older drugs that are available as a generic, like verapamil. Brand name was Calan."

"You need to resume the calisthenics. You still have the weights and I'm willing to jog with you."

"Get me back in shape so I can catch that rock single handedly?"

"We don't know if it's coming straight at us. Look at all the times we went into an alert mode and nothing much came of it. We didn't get but a light dusting of volcanic ash. We always had power, even when those HEMP devices took out the power for over a year. The military handled the Chinese invasion for the most part, except for you getting shot. While we might not be a part of DM's MAG, I believe we could be if we so chose. Riding tomorrow?"

"Riding and some time on the range. Ok?"

"My second and third favorite things to do."

"What's first?"

"Come with me and I'll show you."

Each succeeding night, we'd uncover the telescope and check the light. It slowly began to fill the eyepiece but it also move towards one side forcing us to realign the telescope occasionally. There was no news on the radio, broadcast TV or the cable channels concerning the object.

"DM, JB."

"Come back."

"Have you seen that light in the sky?"

"Just noticed it recently. Any idea what it is?"

"Negative. We bought a cheap telescope to observe it. It doesn't appear to be on a straight line towards us. It's growing in size indicating it's getting closer."

"Should we be concerned?"

"I'm always concerned when something unusual happens and the government, scientific community and mainstream media aren't discussing it."

"Understood. Isn't much we can do about it is there?"

"Cross our fingers I suppose."

"You don't suppose it's really something like *Lucifer's Hammer* or *The Hammer of God* do you?"

"What's that?"

"The first was a novel about a comet strike and the second about an asteroid strike. The second was the basis for *Deep Impact*."

"Never read 'em. TOM has a story posted about an asteroid strike."

"Prophetic?"

"Haven't finished the story so I don't know. You know how he is, 90 percent buildup and 10 percent action."

"Sounds like the two of you. You've been getting ready for over twenty years and are fully prepared. Yet, every time something happens, you add to your preps. What are you up to, fifteen years?"

"Twelve minimum and about forty maximum. Lots of beans and rice."

"You sound like TOM. That would be an awful diet."

"Boring, maybe, but sustaining."

"How many freezers do you have full of frozen food?"

"Four."

"Canned goods?"

"Store bought, one year for two. Home canned, three years for two. LTS about twelve years for two people. The point is we won't just be eating beans and rice, especially considering my age."

"You've been talking that way for as long as I've known you."

"And feeling every day of my age too."

“You out of shape again?”

“We were just discussing that.”

“Me too. How about I come by each day and we work out together?”

“My other half said she’d jog with me.”

“I’ll bring my wife along and we can all four jog.”

“So you are married?”

“Forty two years. HT and his wife have been married forty three.”

“Tomorrow?”

“Sure. Say nine am.”

Her name was Bookkeeper. Still the nom de guerre stuff. Then he remembered telling me he was John Smith and said his wife’s name was Nora. Nora, like Kristin, was reasonably fit. We did a few basic calisthenics, lifted some weights and jogged for a mile. They stayed for lunch, Maid Rites, and we discussed the body building program and the slow approach we’d take to getting back in shape.

Then, the discussion turned to the light in the sky and Kristin and I laid out our observations. They had to leave, but DM asked if they could come back after dark and get a look through the telescope. We agreed with that and told them to be here around nine.

“It’s moved sideways a lot. Hang on while I adjust the scope. Ah, there you go. I wonder if that means it will miss the planet.”

“Let me look. Oh...it almost fills the viewfinder. Maybe we’d better take out the Barrow lens.”

“Nine or twenty five millimeter?”

“Try the nine.”

“Ok, it only fills half the screen.”

“Let me look again. Now there, you can see that it’s tumbling. I definitely think asteroid.”

“Let me see if I can tell. I’ll be damned, it is tumbling, end over end.”

“There’s John and Nora. Go open the gate.”

“Can you see it?”

“Had to reduce the magnification by half. It’s tumbling end over end. Moving to the west too. Had to realign the telescope.”

“How many power is this telescope?”

“The way it’s set up right now 100. We were using 200 until tonight. We have a lens that doubles the magnification. We can reduce it to 36 power with one other eyepiece.”

“Nora, take a look.”

“How can you tell it’s moving west?”

“Had to crank the telescope to the right. It’s pointed south hence the rock is moving west.”

“Will it miss us?”

“I doubt it will hit Iowa. I don’t know about further west. It could miss the planet completely.”

“How big is it?”

“Since we don’t know how far out it is, we can’t calculate the size with the equipment that we have.”

“Surely it’s going to miss or the media would be all over it.”

“I’ve checked DM and there isn’t anything out there that I can find. I agree that this should be news and since it isn’t, it’s tin foil hat time. Kristin and I discussed this and I searched everywhere I know to look.”

“Let me check around. I might come up with someplace or somebody you didn’t access. Tumbling, isn’t it? We’d better go. See you at nine tomorrow.”

“If I can move tomorrow, you mean.”

“Try some Icy Hot; it works wonders for me.”

“You sore?”

“A bit, yes.”

“Don’t let him kid you, he’s a lot sore.”

“Maybe Nora and I should lay in some more preps.”

“How long could you go if there weren’t any stores open?”

“One year on our double bought short term supplies and four more years on our LTS foods from Walton.”

“You don’t need to go through them for everything. I put up a fair portion of our pails of food. Got food grade pails here and there, mostly donut shops. Standard five gallon food grade pails. Sacked the food in a Mylar bag, added a pair of 500 sized oxygen absorbers. Sealed the bags and then the lids with a small amount of silicon. Did corn, oats and wheat mostly. Cheaper than Walton by a long shot and we didn’t have to wait for several weeks for the delivery.”

“How large is your supply of ammo?”

“Before or after we bought the pallet of Hornady A-MAX?”

“A pallet? Are you nuts?”

“No, we’re supplying the entire Canadian Army sniping team. I didn’t order it, Kristin did. We’re in good shape on Beef, Beans, Bullets, Bullion and Bunker.”

“Sounds like I should let you have those rockets and grenades back.”

“Sure wouldn’t turn them down. Why’d you take them back?”

“Didn’t think you’d get full use of your shoulder back. You’re pretty tough old bird.”

“I don’t feel it. If I can get through the training tomorrow, I might actually be able to get up to par for a man my age.”

“Those McMillan rifles are nice but expensive. I should be able to get a single shot for four grand or less. Nora, would you mind?”

“Thanks for putting me on the spot. I suppose not but isn’t that ammo expensive?”

“Kristin, how much did you pay for it buying by the pallet?”

“About four per round including shipping.”

“It’s Match grade John. We’ll sell you all you want at our cost.”

“Nora?”

“Oh all right. Give him back his rockets and hand grenades; I don’t like having them in the basement.”

Basement? Oh-oh.

“We’re leaving. See you at nine in the morning.”

“What do you think he’ll get?”

“If he’s going to keep it cheap, probably an AR-50. With good optics and a suppressor, his rifle will be a good unit. Not a 0.5MOA rifle, but adequate.”

“How good is it?”

“Under 1MOA. We can’t pay him for the rockets and hand grenades but we can give him a few boxes of ammo.”

They were there at 8:45 the next morning. We moved the two cases of rockets to the storage building and eight cases of grenades.

“What’s the deal; you left us with the concussion grenades and took back the Thermate and four cases of Fragmentation.”

“Well, we found two more cases of the M61s and one more case of the Thermate. Since you’re supplying me ammo at wholesale, we decided to give you the extras.”

“That’s ironic. We discussed giving you some of the ammo. When will you have the rifle?”

“This afternoon. I’m putting on a Night Force scope and an Elite Iron suppressor. Damn, I hope we don’t get caught with this stuff.”

“You’ll want some Raufoss?”

“Three cans should be enough for now. I have the M1022 already and with the A-MAX I should be set. I had the radio on when we came over. They mentioned the asteroid.”

“Then it’s confirmed it’s an asteroid?”

“Apparently. Said it will pass the Earth just outside of orbit of the Moon. At least that’s what JPL is saying.”

“You want to come back tonight and have another look?”

“Wouldn’t miss it for the world. We’re going to hit Costco and Sam’s this afternoon. Need anything?”

“Can you get me another case of Jack Daniels and a case of Bombay Sapphire Gin?”

“I’ll give it a shot. No promises. I thought you didn’t drink much.”

“We don’t. But I’m down to my last 47 bottles and wouldn’t want to run out.”

“Who drinks the gin?”

“She likes Tom Collins and I like gin and tonic during hot weather.”

“How much booze do you have stored up?”

“For us or counting the trade goods?”

“Either way.”

“I don’t have an exact count but probably on the order of four or five cases of what we like. We even have bourbon although I not particularly a fan. I prefer the Tennessee whiskey. In addition, we have that plus bourbon and Canadian whiskey.”

“I know where we’re coming for New Year’s Eve.”

“You realize that we have one disaster left don’t you?”

“Huh?”

“Bad things happen in threes. The volcanic period really didn’t affect us so it’s out. The HEMP attack was part of the war with the Chinese hence a single event. That Mega Tsunami was the second major disaster. From this point of view, we’re down to one event remaining. On the other hand, if you include the volcanic activity, Cascadia and the HEMP as separate events, that brings us to five and leave four more to happen.”

“Wouldn’t it still be one? Five plus one equals six. Either way, there’s only one remaining.”

“It’s exponential. You know 3, 9, 27, 81.”

After we finished our workout, John and Nora left to do some shopping. We took the time to update our inventory, which was usually off by a few items. Apparently because of the new computer program, our periodic inventory matched our computer inventory. When John and Nora returned after supper, he and I moved the coke, squirt, seven up and Collins mix to the storage building. I quickly added the liquor to our inventory and we joined the ladies for a little star gazing.

We had to crank the telescope about 2" to the west to center the image and switch from the 9mm eyepiece to the 25mm eyepiece.

"It's getting close. Take a look; you can even see some features with the 36 power lens."

"I'm not so sure that it's going to pass outside the Moon's orbit. Take another look."

"Hmm, you may be right. Kristin why don't you and Nora take a look and see what you think?"

"You guys could be right. Nora, you take a look."

"This is only $\frac{1}{3}$ the power of the setting from last night?"

"Thirty six compared to one hundred."

"In that case, I agree. I think it will pass closer to the Earth than they reported. Maybe as close as 100,000km."

"What the distance between the Earth and the Moon?"

"I can answer that," Nora replied. "It varies from about 360,000km and 405,000km in round numbers."

"You're an astronomer?"

"Not really. I had an interest in it in High School science class and pursued it during Junior College. I could be wrong, it may pass closer."

"I could use a drink," John muttered.

"Come into the house, we have a bit of most everything."

"Nora?"

"Tom Collins, please."

"Kristin?"

One Tin Soldier – Chapter 24

“Tom Collins.”

“John?”

“You have Single barrel?”

“Yep.”

“Two fingers neat.”

“I’ll join you in that. Let me get a tray of ice.”

After the drinks were made and passed out, the conversation resumed.

“If Nora is right, we could have a problem. Say it passes very close to the Earth maybe skimming the surface of the Pacific. What would happen then?”

“Kristin, was that *3 Time Jinx* by Jerry or TOM?”

“Jerry.”

“What are the two of you talking about?”

“Well, Jerry D. Young is a patriot fiction writer that we both follow when we can. He had a story that included Planet X skimming the Pacific on December 21, 2012 when the Mayan Calendar ended. Wiped out Hawaii. And, in the Atlantic, it triggered La Palma causing the Cumbre Vieja volcano to explode. Which, in turn created the tsunami. We don’t have to worry about that since Cumbre Vieja already slid into the Atlantic.”

“But, it’s going east to west, not west to east.”

“Won’t make a lot of difference if it skims the ocean or worse, slams into it. Maybe we’ll get lucky and it will slam into China and end our problems with them for once and all.”

“That might not be good,” Nora suggested. “Imagine how much soil would be thrown into the air.”

I looked at Kristin and she replied to Nora.

“That’s been covered in a story titled *Disaster In The ‘Burbs*. Asteroid broke up as it hit the Earth’s atmosphere. Got up to about 140 degrees out for a while. The people who came through it the best had shelters, like the heroine, Darlene.”

“You two talk like these two guys, TOM and Jerry are good writers.”

“Jerry has published two books that are available on Amazon, *Shipwrecked* and *Mr. Man*. TOM hasn’t published any that I’m aware of. All of his stories can be found on Frugal’s Forums starting around 2004. You have to go into the archives for some of them but they’re all there. He also developed an Excel spreadsheet to compute shelter stay time based on the seven/ten rule. It’s a sticky under Emergency and Disaster Preparedness.”

“I’ve got it. So that’s where it came from?”

“There’s another out there. I’m not sure where, maybe Alpha Rubicon. It’s very complicated. I think TOM assumes you have an adequate protection factor if you build a shelter. Six feet of earth or seventy two inches is adequate. That’s twenty halving thicknesses. The reciprocal of zero point five to the twentieth power is over a million. Soil is heavy so you probably have six inches of concrete holding it up and that just increases your protection power.”

“How do you keep track of all of this stuff?”

“When I retired from the Air Force and got into prepping, I started a sort of a journal. I went back to when I originally enlisted and covered the high and low points of my Air Force career. After that, I noted things as they happened, for the most part. It’s all there, more or less. Maybe I’ll become famous and have to publish my memoirs.”

“It may not matter much.”

“Why not Kristin?”

“Let’s say for sake of illustration that hits the Far East, either the ocean or on land. You’ve got a few known nuclear powers like China, North Korea and in the Indian Ocean, India and Pakistan. Plus some unknowns, like probably Japan and Taiwan. What’s that, more than half the Earth’s population starving? If they resort to war, it will escalate until it includes every nuclear power on the planet. Between the dust and/or moisture in the air combined with the airborne fallout, it will take years before the planet recovers. Jerry warned in more than one of his stories that it could take at least a generation. In that one story about the climate change, *Man It’s Cold Outside*, it took 500 years.”

“If that happens, honey, we may get a chance to use up some of that ammunition and ordnance.”

“Protecting what we have?”

“Exactly.”

“At least you two have a greenhouse.”

“True, but we’ve been prepping for over twenty years. It doesn’t happen overnight unless your name is Neal Grant.”

“Who is Neal Grant?”

“*The Hermit*. A guy from St. Louis who lost his entire family in an auto accident. He was already wealthy and spotting a small gold store got him to thinking about a cave in the Ozarks. He sold out lock, stock and barrel and converted a lot of it to gold and silver. He found a property and improved it. Got himself a fancy PAW vehicle and so forth. Part of his money went into annuities and every annuity check he got went into more preps until he ran out of room. Jerry wrote that one.”

“Don’t forget Percivale George Jackson.”

“*Percy’s Mission*? Hard to forget. Percy was an Iowa farmer. The story included a couple into landscaping/earthmoving, a plumber and his girlfriend and a bum name Charlie if I remember. A tale of World War Three and the aftermath.”

“So you read them online?”

“Hell no. We copy them into Word and save them on the computer in document format and portable document format. I suppose I could violate their copyrights and burn you a copy but I’d hate to get caught. What I can do is burn a copy in pdf and let you read them and give them back if you promise not to copy them.”

“You’d take my word I wouldn’t copy them?”

“A man’s word is his bond.”

I didn’t tell him that included in the stories were copies of *Mr. Man* and *Shipwrecked* that I gotten from Mr. Young. Nor did I mention the two unpublished/unposted stories he’d sent to me. Those wouldn’t be included. One of them was about 2,335 pages long and took a week to read. It was a twelve megabyte pdf file. It was undoubtedly his finest story, bar none. I got a call from David the following day and he wanted to talk to us. We drove over to Kelley for a cup of coffee and some conversation.

“You’re a lot better compared to last time.”

“I actually feel a little better. I’m completely off pain meds and have an early morning Physical Therapy session every day at 6:00 am. That allows Melody to take me up, wait until the session is over and drop me off at home before she has to go to work.”

“How are you two doing financially?”

“We’re making it between my SS Disability, the retirement pension and her wages. Doesn’t leave much disposable income after all the bills are paid. The last time we added to our preps was when you gave us the ammo.”

“Food holding out ok?”

“We’re staying even. What’s your take on that asteroid?”

“We watched for some time in an inexpensive telescope we bought. We knew it was moving to the west. With the media, governmental and scientific community blackout our best guess is a near miss.”

“How near?”

“It could move through the upper atmosphere.”

“Splash down?”

“Possible?”

“Anything is possible. I don’t think it’s probable.”

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Interestingly, the US government and agencies like NASA, JPL and the like issued no official reports of a possible impact event. The asteroid or Centaur or whatever it was entered the Pacific at an extremely shallow angle, traveling hundreds, if not thousands of miles before it slowed and fell to the seafloor. It was Cumbre Vieja in reverse with the Pacific coasts and islands bearing the brunt of the tsunami. While Cumbre Vieja slid into the Atlantic, the small size of the object had velocity multiplied by its mass and the tsunami reflected the combined energy otherwise known as momentum.

It was almost a non-event excluding the residents of the various Pacific coasts and islands. Initial estimates of the death tolls ranged from 1 million to 20 million. Cambridge experienced none of the results from the impact event.

“This is getting old,” Kristin said shaking her head.

“Do you suppose we should go shopping before something else happens?”

“Are you out of your mind?”

“Just curious.”

The ‘Rock’ had ended up at the bottom of the Mariana Trench and scientists’ claimed there was no way to retrieve it from that depth. The resulting damage was on the same

scale as the mega-tsunami caused by Cumbre Vieja. Does the rule of threes apply if you aren't affected by the bad thing? I'm going to chance a guess and presume it doesn't. That left with us with 3 rather than 4 so we shouldn't have to worry about numbers five through nine.

One Tin Soldier – Epilog

A few years later, I began to experience severe pain just below my anterior ribcage. As much as I hated to see a doctor, I didn't have a choice.

“Have you been experiencing this pain for long?”

“About six months back, I had some pain and treated it with Vicodin ES. That really didn't seem to help, but the pain passed. Maybe a month later, I had another attack that put me on my back for three days. After that episode, the intervals became shorter and the pain more severe.”

“And the pain medicine didn't stop the pain?”

“Not really.”

“I'm going to order a CT scan. I have a suspicion but need the CT to confirm it. Wait here and I'll check on something and be back in a few minutes.”

“Ok Mr. Jones, it just so happens that the CT scanner will be free in one hour. I'll like you to get it done today.”

“Today?”

“Yes, today. It's important. I also want you stop by the lab for a blood draw. When you're done, see my receptionist for an appointment for the day after tomorrow.”

“Is it serious?”

“Possibly. I won't know for sure until I see the CT scan and lab work. I see that your shoulder healed well. Did you regain full use? Oh, I assisted on that joint replacement.”

I took the slip he handed me and got directions to the Lab. After a fifteen minute wait, they drew three vials of blood and pointed me in the direction of Radiology. That wait was about 25 minutes before I was shown in and told to disrobe. Open backed hospital gowns were on a shelf in the changing room. I locked the door and took the key with me.

“Key please?”

“Here you go.”

“Have you had a CT scan before?”

“Not that I recall. I have had an MRI.”

“Ok, lay down on this gurney and we’ll run you through the scanner.”

“I’m back. The doctor said to schedule an appointment for the day after tomorrow.”

“Eleven am ok? If not, he can see you at 2pm.”

“Eleven is fine.”

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“What did the doctor say?”

“Nothing. He said he had suspicions but didn’t elaborate. He ordered a blood draw and a CT scan. I have to go back day after tomorrow for the results.”

“Can I go with you when you go back?”

“Sure. In the meantime, I’m going to check a few things on Wiki.”

“What did Wiki have to say?”

“The symptoms match acute Pancreatitis. It listed several symptoms and a few causes like alcohol abuse, smoking and some other things.”

“What other things?”

“Several things. I don’t remember all of them. It affects more men than women and is more prevalent in men over sixty.”

I wasn’t about to tell her that one of things that caused the symptoms was cancer. The article suggested if pancreatic cancer was the underlying cause, symptoms frequently didn’t appear until the cancer reached stage III. That explained why the survival rate was very low. The options were limited, the Whipple Procedure followed up with chemotherapy.

Kristin seemed very concerned but no more than I was. Que sera, sera.

“Let’s go out for dinner.”

“What did you have in mind Jason?”

“How about Chuck’s down in Des Moines? Best onion rings in the state of Iowa. Maybe a steak, baked and salad with the rings as an appetizer.”

“If you’re sure, ok.”

“Grab a shower and I follow you. Let’s go western tonight.”

One thing that startled me was when I stepped on the scale at the doctor’s office. I was down 14 pounds. That went along with some of what I’d read on Wiki.

“Next?”

“I won’t be long, 20 minutes.”

“K”

I took a quick shower, brushed my teeth and shaved. Next, I selected the best of my western shirts, newest jeans and gave my boots a lick. I taped my hat and was ready to go.

“Ready Kirstin?”

“Locked and loaded. You?”

“Only have the G30.”

“You look peaked, are you sure you’re ok?”

“I’m fine.”

I should be... I’d taken a 40mg Oxycontin. It was enough to block my discomfort, barely. I had a spare in a tissue in my shirt pocket. With the Oxycontin, I’d have to skip a drink because of the synergy between booze and the medication.

“Feel like driving?”

“Are you sure you’re ok?”

“Tired... long day and you know how I hate to go to the doctor.”

“Sure. Buckle up.”

Maybe I would have a drink. She usually had a Tom Collins and I had Jack rocks. I was afraid if I didn’t have a drink, she might see through the façade. It would be bad enough when I ordered the petite filet instead of my usual 12oz sirloin. They also put together a pretty mean Caesar salad.

We were seated immediately and the cocktail waitress was there to take our order.

“Tom Collins for my wife and Jack rocks for me. Could you send the waitress back so we could order an appetizer, please?”

“I can take your order and give it to her.”

“Great. The large order of onion rings.”

“Tom Collins, Jack rocks and large rings. Anything else?”

“Not for the moment, thank you.”

“You’re keeping up a good front, Jason. The eyes are the windows to the soul. How bad are you hurting, really?”

“At the moment, not that bad. I took an Oxycontin.”

“Maybe we should just pay and go home.”

“Kirstin, I really want this night out. The reason I asked you to drive was because of the pill and the drink I ordered. May I bring up a difficult subject or should it wait until we get home?”

“Lite or heavy?”

“I’ll keep it lite.”

“Go ahead.”

“You know that I intended that David and Melody have my possessions after I’m gone?”

“You said it was in your will.”

“I did, didn’t I? Should something happen, will you stay where we live or move back to Adel? I’m just curious.”

“I’m not sure... it depends. Did you include the disposition of our place in your will?”

“I didn’t. That’s why I asked the question. It was an oversight that I’ll fix by adding a codicil to my will. Your answer will be reflected in the codicil.”

“In the unlikely event that something happens, I think I’d prefer to stay here, in the Bungalow.”

“Fair enough you’ll get the property and all of my possessions not otherwise intended for David and Melody.”

The cocktail waitress brought our drinks and onion rings. It was a good time to change the subject.

“Um, good.”

“The rings or the drink?”

“Yes. And the company can’t be beat.”

“You still have that je ne sais quoi.”

“Is that good or bad?”

“It translates roughly into ‘undefined something special’.”

“Thank you. It applies equally to you.”

Between the pill and the drink, any discomfort I had quickly faded. In fact, I ended up ordering the 12 ounce sirloin. We ate our rings and well before they were finished, put in our dinner order, Caesar salads, our usual steaks and baked. It was a pleasant evening. I dozed off on the way back to Cambridge.

“Wake up, we’re home.”

“Sorry. I really enjoyed that. Thank you.”

The pain in my gut woke me around 4am. I took an Oxycontin and started coffee. Then, I sat down with a pad and made notes concerning the codicil. After I had the chores done, I’d go see my attorney.

We got in early and gave him the list I’d written up for the codicil. He wasn’t busy and asked how soon I wanted it. I told him today, if possible. He said to come back at 2pm. Kirstin and I went shopping just to kill the time. It was Tuesday so we stopped at that little café behind the Register and Tribune and had their famous bean soup. Other than the meal and the attorney fees, we hadn’t spent a dime. The attorney validated parking so we left the Suburban sit and walked, working out the kinks.

“You’ll get that filed today?”

“Immediately.”

“How much?”

“Three hundred. You can pay my receptionist.”

“Thank you.”

“It was my pleasure. Strictly boiler plate.” (Boilerplate is any text that is or can be reused in new contexts or applications without being changed much from the original.)

Kirstin went with me to see the doctor the following day. He smiled, but seemed grim.

“As much as I hate to admit it, my estimation of your condition was correct. It was confirmed by a blood test, CA19-9 and the CT scan. You have pancreatic cancer, stage three.”

“I suspected as much and looked it up, Doc. Stage three makes it too late for a Whipple or chemotherapy, doesn’t it?”

“At best, it would only give you a few months. The Whipple is a complicated procedure often lasting 9 or more hours. The chemo would keep you sick as a dog. It’s your choice, of course.”

“I’ve had a good run. I’d prefer quality over quantity. Can you do anything for the pain?”

“Are you limited to Vicodin ES?”

“No, we have some Oxycontin 40mg.”

“I’ll write three prescriptions; one for more of the 40mg, a second for the 80mg and a third for morphine. Are you going to get a nurse, check into a hospice or stay home?”

“Stay home. Kirstin and I’ve both been trained on injections. Is that ok with you Kirstin?”

“What?”

“Jason to Kirstin, Earth calling.”

“Oh, you suspected didn’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Home care for as long as possible will be ok.”

“These are strong analgesics and if the pharmacy gives you a problem, tell them to call me. I’ll also write a script for the needles and syringes. We may resort to a PCA where you self-administer the morphine IV. We’ll discuss that should the need arise.”

“How long?”

“It’s difficult to say. Typically six months.”

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“You knew!”

“Suspected. It was only a guess and could have simply been pancreatitis. Would you mind stopping by David’s?”

“Not today.”

“Sure, ok.”

From the moment Doc said pancreatic cancer, the tears started to flow. This was not the time to press. When we got home, Kirstin told me that she needed a little space. I went out and fussed around in the greenhouse after I took another 40mg pill. It cut the edge, barely. When I couldn’t find anything else to do in the greenhouse, I returned to the house.

“What would you like for dinner?”

“Lady’s choice.”

“Tenderloin and fries ok?”

“Perfect.”

“Jason, why didn’t you tell me what you suspected?”

“Because I wasn’t sure. It could have been pancreatitis which is not that uncommon in men my age. Let’s just make the most of the time we have left together. Don’t bother to fill the script for the 40mg pills, they barely cut it. It’s only BID and I took two this morning already.”

“I’ll run up to Ames and fill the prescriptions. Want to ride along?”

“I think I’ll drive over to Kelley and talk to David while you do that. I want to explain about my guns and things.”

“I should be back in an hour.”

“I won’t be gone much longer.”

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“How are you doing, David? Physical therapy working?”

“As much as possible.”

“Have you looked into knee joint replacement?”

“We don’t have the money.”

“That wasn’t what I asked. Would you do me a favor and look into it? There are various procedures ranging from partial replacement to full replacement. As I understand it, the best choice is to just do the minimum. I’ll pay for it, lock stock and barrel. Now, speaking of guns, you know I have a lot, right?”

“Absolutely!”

“What you don’t know is that I have pancreatic cancer with a six month prognosis. When I’m gone, Melody and you will inherit my entire gun collection and half the ammo since Kirstin will keep the other half. You need to get those knees fixed so you’ll be mobile enough to use the guns, for pleasure shooting if nothing else.”

“I don’t know what to say. Are you sure about the cancer?”

“Came from the doctor earlier today. I’ve had a good run and meeting Kirstin was the best thing that ever happened to me. We’ve weather the worst that Nature and man has thrown our way. By the way, DM replaced what he took back when I got shot. Kirstin will show you.”

“Aw man, this is the pits.”

“It’s life.”

Afterword: Jason actually only lasted five months and asked me to finish up his journal. He got David the needed surgery and David is about 90% whole. He only uses a cane these days. I eventually explained everything to David and Melody about his father and mother. He’s never talked to them since. I’ve tried to convince him that wasn’t necessary, but he’s stubborn.

Per his wishes, Jason was cremated and we interred his ashes in a small stone memorial in the backyard. These days, Melody no longer works because Jason, bless his soul, gave his precious metal holdings to David and Melody. She helps in the garden we still raise and helps with the canning. They eventually bought a house next to Jason’s Bungalow and moved. Their property in Kelley sold, eventually. We ride and shoot on the weekends. It’s not the same as before, but I’ve sort of adopted them. I had my will made out and they’ll get everything when I’m gone in another 20 years or so. That’s the story of my Tin Soldier.

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